Indigenous Maya Knowledge and the Possibility of Decolonizing Education in Guatemala

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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Abstract

Maya peoples in Guatemala continue to practice their Indigenous knowledge in spite of the violence experienced since the Spanish invasion in 1524. From 1991 until 1996, the state and civil society signed a series of Peace Accords that promised to better meet the needs of the Maya, Xinka, Garífuna and non-Indigenous groups living there. In this context, how does the current educational system meet the varied needs of these groups? My research investigates the philosophy and praxis of Maya Indigenous knowledge (MIK) in broadly defined educational contexts through the stories of 17 diverse Maya professional women and men involved in educational reform that currently live and work in Guatemala City. How do they reclaim and apply their ancestral knowledge daily? What possible applications of MIK can transform society? The findings reveal that MIK promotes social change and healing within and outside institutionalized educational spaces and argues that academia needs to make room for Indigenous theorizing mainly in areas of education, gender, knowledge production, and nation building. I analyze these areas from anticolonial and critical Indigenous standpoints from which gender and Indigenous identities weave through the text. Thus, I rely on Maya concepts and units of analyses (Jun Winaq’) guided by an Indigenous research methodology (Tree of Life) to conduct informal
and in-depth interviews that lasted 2 to 4 hours. In addition, I held a talking circle with half of the participants. My analysis is founded on my own experience as an Indigenous person, my observations and participation in two Maya organizations in 2007 and a review of secondary literature in situ.

The study contributes to a general understanding of contemporary Maya peoples and knowledge, and describes the theoretical validity of the Maya concept of Jun Winaq’. I argue that this concept seeks to heal individuals and a society to strengthen the Maya and all peoples. Throughout the dissertation I highlight the value of Indigenous knowledge and voices as parts of a political process that has the potential to decolonize mainstream education. I end with a graphic illustration of the elements in Maya Indigenous education and discuss future research for building a political agenda based on self-determination and healing relevant to Indigenous struggles globally.
Acknowledgments

This research is part of a larger personal undertaking to reclaim my Indigenous knowledge. It began to take shape after I weaved together the stories of Aboriginal friends and colleagues with whom I had exchanged stories and found the similarities in our experiences with colonization. Some even accepted me as part of their community. I wish to say maltyox (thank you) for your understanding and support during tough times and for sharing the stories and knowledge that can only come from your intricate relationship to your territory. It is the land on which I currently live and where I am committed to supporting Indigenous struggles.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to my family for encouraging me to not give up. Further, there are countless people and institutions that supported my research. In Guatemala, the Maya people, past and present, have demonstrated their loving recognition and acceptance as I engaged in the process of reclaiming my Maya identity. Your guidance has given me the strength and vision to continue on this path. In particular, I am grateful to Dr. José Yac Noj, a friend and colleague who introduced me to both the National Council for Maya Education (CNEM, in Spanish) and the Academy for Maya Languages in Guatemala (ALMG). This work flourished due to his friendship and invaluable help in opening up spaces to meet Maya professionals in the field of Indigenous education and for his assistance in explaining, translating, and interpreting some key concepts that are found in the Maya K’ich’e language. As the study title suggests, the heart of this dissertation is an exploration of how a group of Indigenous Maya professionals, who live and work in Guatemala City, Guatemala, illustrate that the foundations of Maya Indigenous Education (MIE) are alive and applicable in the 21st century. The participants demonstrate, through their understandings and praxis of Maya Indigenous knowledge, that it is possible to navigate between community and state institutions without losing their distinct Maya identities. Their work creates bridges and critical dialogues between Indigenous and non-Indigenous actors and between Indigenous women and men. Dr. Noj’s contributions were vital to this work. I also wish to thank the strong women leaders and members of Majawil Q’ij, a Maya Indigenous women’s association that was established in 1991. Specifically, I want to acknowledge and thank Juana Menchú, María Morales, and Ana Ventura. Their friendship, knowledge, and networking in events and meetings helped me to learn about the advocacy process for Indigenous women and appreciate the value of diverse opinions and strategies. Having access to their members and work
allowed me to observe and understand the complex social relations that are embedded in their work around Indigenous women and men.

At the CNEM, I would like to acknowledge the assistance of the 2006/2007 Ajpop or Director, Edgar Choguaj Chajil, researchers, and support staff. In particular, I would like to express my gratitude to Leticia Sontay Tuj for her endless work in providing contacts and pertinent literature and her support in translating and interpreting texts from Maya K’ich’e to Spanish. In addition, I would like to acknowledge Dr. Julio Cesar Diaz Argueta, Director of Postgraduate Programs at Guatemala’s San Carlos State University, for his support. Thanks also to Eduardo Sacayón, the 2007 Director of the Institute for Inter-ethnic Studies (Instituto de Estudios Interétnicos) at San Carlos State University, who provided materials and a physical space in which to work. I would also like to thank some of CNEM’s member organizations, particularly the Programa de Educación Intercultural de Centroamérica (PROEIMCA), Pop Noj, Programa de Desarrollo Santiago (PRODESSA), Fundación Rigoberta Menchú Tum (FRMT), Asociación de Centros Educativos Mayas de Nivel Medio (ACEM), and Dirección General de Educación Bilingüe Intercultural (DIGEBI), del Ministerio de Educación, Guatemala, and Academia de Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala (ALMG). At a personal level, I am grateful to the peoples who I have met during my meetings and travels and to the Elder’s council in Sololá, Guatemala.

In Canada, I would like to thank the International Development Research Center (IDRC) for funding my field research through a Doctoral Research Award (2007–2008). I am also grateful to my supervisor, Dr. Judy Iseke, for her mentorship, assistance, and encouragement and appreciate the knowledge and guidance of my thesis committee: Jean-Paul Restoule, Njoki Wane, and the external readers. Ananya Mukherjee Reed, your friendship and support inspired me in many ways. I would not be here today without my family’s love and patience, especially to my daughter, Attiya Nikt’e’ whose light shone through from my womb until I finally gave birth to her and, eventually, to the dissertation as well. Your presence reminded me to appreciate beauty and of my responsibility to strengthen my Maya identity so I can pass on the knowledge shared with me to the younger generations. Melissa Chance, your friendship and continuing support, particularly in providing comments at the end, gave me a fresh perspective. Your words encouraged me to continue the journey in spite of the setbacks and challenges. Finally, this dissertation is possible due to the intellectual work of many Indigenous scholars whose research
has inspired me: Sandy Grande, Taiaiake Alfred, Andrea Smith, Linda Tuhiwai-Smith, Graham Smith, Gregory Cajete, Vine Deloria Jr., Devon Mihesuah, Margaret Kovach, Cora Webber-Pillwax, Shawn Wilson, Oren Lyons, the late John Mohawk, Riyad Shahjahan, Kimine Mayuzumi, George Dei, Bonita Lawrence, and countless others who have motivated me.

*Maltyox.*
Preface

I am here because of the Grandmothers and Grandfathers who have walked before me. Hence, it is important that I thank the ancestors and spirits of this land (Turtle Island) in Toronto, Canada, as well as those of the Maya territory (Mayab’) where I was born. In light of the violence and recent records of genocide, I need to acknowledge how my ancestors opened the way for me. Their example inspires me to continue opening new paths for my daughter and future generations to avoid the atrocities of the past and present. This dissertation is an illustration of the path I chose to take, on which I continue to learn, unlearn, and decolonize. Writing this piece truly tested the extent of my conviction, faith, and hope that transformation can occur within ourselves as individuals in relation to the societies we live in.

It is also important to locate myself. I write as a heterosexual, able-bodied, brown-skinned, Maya Indigenous woman born in Guatemala City, Guatemala. I presently live in Turtle Island (Canada). My work represents a commitment to demystify and complicate current understandings of contemporary Maya—even those who have mixed blood like I do. Having mixed blood in a country where racial purity is confined to essentialized elements of culture—such as wearing traditional clothing and living in rural areas—marked my understanding of my identity as a “Guatemalan.” I knew from a young age that living an urban existence and not wearing the traditional clothes or speaking my original Maya Achi’ language disqualified me from being Indigenous. Nevertheless, I would not escape the imposition of many labels throughout my life. It began with acceptance of the label mestiza or mixed-blood in Guatemala. Through my parents’ adherence to this label, I reaped the benefits of the imagined majority mestizo population. Although this identity recognizes the mixture of Indigenous and Spanish blood, it set the terms of engagement with Indigenous peoples. It marked my family in a way that the denial of our Indigenous identity soon became an expression of internalized racism. This denial and distancing from anything Indigenous affected my early years.

Growing up, I did not know that I had relatives who still lived in Maya Achi’ territory and who speak the language. It was not until many years later, when I began asking questions about my identiti(es) and the role that colonial education has had on them, that I became more inspired and determined to undergo a critical self-evaluation regarding my identity as a Maya
woman living outside of Guatemala, and also continue my studies in Indigenous education. It was the exploration of my own experiences, coupled with the work of Indigenous academics at a global level that informed my work.

Along the way, my research proved that the marginalization and exclusion that I endured were not unique. Moreover, it allowed me to question and define my identity—Indigenous or mestiza. I personally encountered others who also had to search for ways in which their Indigenous identity implied undertaking the responsibility to reclaim, share, respect, and protect Indigenous knowledges. This reclamation of my Indigenous identity outlines a political project grounded in my experiences that centers spirit. Again, this position highlights a critical political positioning regarding Indigenous identity in terms of the responsibilities acquired through the claiming of this identity. Through these responsibilities I have come to understand the centrality of spirituality in grounding my own political work and in making connections with the struggles of Indigenous peoples at a global level through exploring the similarities amongst many Indigenous stories and values.

The parallels shared at a global level with other Indigenous groups do not imply in any way that all Indigenous peoples are the same; rather, they speak to the threads that unite humanity to each other, to the cosmos, and to the universe. In this sense, there exists a unity that intersects differences, whereby spirituality is also a fundamental dimension of an Indigenous decolonization process. To be very clear, my experiences have informed my identities and the lenses through which I have analyzed the stories in this dissertation. Thus, I am aware that constructions of Indigenous identity have different effects depending on the context and time. Given that my experience with Indigenous identity and my relationship to my territory differs from that of the participants in the study, I do not highlight the Indigenous identity construction process further. In fact, the participants expressed they are clear about their own Indigenous identities. In that context, my ruminations over my own identity take a back seat; it would take another dissertation to really explore those issues in depth. My intention is to discuss identity in the context of education and the reclamation and praxis of Indigenous knowledge for the purpose of elucidating Indigenous issues as they pertain to education in Guatemala and in a way, across the globe.
Efforts to decolonize and/or Indigenize the academy using Indigenous understandings are increasing, particularly in Africa, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States. There is also literature that illustrates a similar and yet less known trend within Indigenous peoples in Latin America. The challenge for scholars engaged in research with, for and by Indigenous peoples in Latin America and within the field of Latin American studies is the limited access and availability of Indigenous theoretical and discursive frameworks, research methodologies and efforts to decolonize the very foundations of education. Following Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai-Smith (1999), I also believe it is necessary to deconstruct the colonial institutions that have largely denied Indigenous peoples the right for self-determination. Therefore, it is equally important to provide alternatives. Unpacking the terms decolonization and Indigenization becomes central to understanding the conceptual basis of this dissertation. Decolonizing in this context involves constructing Indigenous alternatives to Western regimes of research based on emergent tribal social issues, practices, and beliefs in an attempt to decolonize both the academy and academics. It follows the process of decolonization as articulated by Blaut (1989, p. 80) as one of reclaiming one’s history and understanding how it has contributed to society. It also involves re-righting (L. T. Smith, 1999) colonial history to show how it has led to the impoverishment of Indigenous societies both materially and spiritually. To explain, L.T. Smith’s use of re-righting history implies understanding that “writing is part of theorizing and writing is part of history” (L. T. Smith, 1999, 29). In this sense, Indigenous views contest Western accounts of history, as found “within genealogies, within the landscape, within weaving and carvings” (L. T. Smith, 33) in addition to oral accounts. In this context, the center of my decolonizing project is constructed through Maya metaphors of space and time, through or Ceiba (the Tree of Life) and the process of becoming Jun Winaq’ (becoming whole again) as possible ways through which all human beings, not only Indigenous peoples, can reclaim their own humanity. I discuss this concept further in the next section.

The process of Indigenizing institutions or spaces is another concept to which I refer in this dissertation. Devon Mihesuah (2004) uses this term in relation to the academy:

To Indigenize spaces we must seek to … imagine the academy as a location from which Indigenous Peoples appropriate research, writing and other non- (and sometimes anti-) Indigenous educational resources to seek justice for past and enduring crimes, to combat unyielding colonization, to safeguard treaty rights, and to advance general well-being among Indigenous communities … the argument emerging here is that the authority for Indigenous studies must be
located prominently among Indigenous institutions and Indigenous ways of knowing and being. (p. 219)

This dissertation borrows this idea to further support the argument that current education, particularly through the organization of its disciplines (L. T. Smith, 1999, p. 65), its language and concepts (Battiste, 1986, 1998), and its institutions promotes colonialism (Archibald, 2008; L. T. Smith, 1999). I also argue that if we decolonize and Indigenize education, then we will be able to transform negative readings and perceptions of Indigenous peoples into positive ones. Thus, one of my research interests is to contribute to re-establishing the foundations of education in Guatemala as it stands today. It is, in fact, a call for and example of, considering the transformational possibilities of Indigenous knowledges.

At the core of my work lies the relationship of educational reform to the application or inclusion of the various proposals that Maya peoples have put forth in what I have coined as Maya Proposals for Education Reform (MPER). Using some elements of the MPER as its contextual base, particularly the concept of balance, this dissertation argues that Maya Indigenous knowledge (MIK) has much to contribute to decolonizing education. MPER examines the processes through which MIK in education seeks to promote a lifelong commitment to engaging diversity in a horizontal manner. This horizontal agenda demonstrates the possibilities and tensions that exist in decolonizing education, not only within Western frameworks (educational reform) but also within Indigenous spaces (Indigenous or community-based education). I am acutely aware of these tensions as I also write this in a Western context that necessitates following certain protocols without overlooking the Indigenous teachings that call me to do things in a balanced way, whereby the goal is to “attain a mutual balance and harmony among animals, peoples, elements of nature, and the Spirit world (Archibald, 2008, p. 11). In other words, the teachings imply an understanding that everyone’s choices actions, thoughts, and words affect the balance of the universe. This pertains to Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike. Thus, attaining balance requires awareness and the hope to heal, particularly when seeking to find balance within contexts that are out of balance. An important finding that emerged from this work is the participants’ awareness and efforts to re-envision spaces in need of balance: education, gender relations and state engagement within its discourse of citizenship. Moreover, as the research process moved along, I also realized the inherent danger of focusing exclusively on cultural and representational issues, as they are sometimes viewed as taking away
from the political project of reclaiming Indigenous knowledge and ways of social organization for the purpose of self-determination. This dissertation addresses both.

As L. T. Smith suggests (1999) it is indeed necessary to apply an appropriate Indigenous methodology and conceptual framework whereby research is conducted in an organic manner. This process leads to organizing and interpreting the research in a way that validates the voices and knowledge produced. Using Indigenous knowledge as its foundation, this methodology allows me to ground my theoretical framework upon my own understanding of MIK, in which cultural knowledge and spiritual practices are central. The application of MIK in this dissertation further legitimates its usefulness and importance for education. This last point is obviously political. It speaks to the applicability of MIE to all peoples and not only to Indigenous Maya peoples as it troubles certain assumptions about the meaning of equality, justice and democracy, and the means to achieve them.

This dissertation represents an interdisciplinary conversation that demonstrates that MIE is pertinent today. On a general level, it also seeks to strengthen the four groups that presently live in Guatemala because of the points that converge across Indigenous cultures, understanding their differences as well. These similarities can provide a guide from which to respect each culture’s differences and contributions to society. It also makes nuanced distinctions between the Maya peoples’ hopes for a better future that are within grasp, and the others that will only be realized after many years of healing from spirit injuries caused by colonization and everyone’s role in maintaining those structures. As Marie Battiste (Public presentation, 2012) has clearly stated, “we have all been marinated in Eurocentrism and thus, cannot say that we are not complicit in upholding those values.” My hope is that this work will contribute to the ongoing conversation regarding the need to build transnational coalitions with Indigenous peoples all over the world in order to create a world whereby all beings, in connection with the universe and Creator, will truly live in harmony and peace.
# Table of Contents

Abstract .......................................................................................................................................... ii
Acknowledgments ......................................................................................................................... iv
Preface .......................................................................................................................................... vii

**Chapter 1 Introduction** ................................................................................................................. 1
  - Introduction ............................................................................................................................... 1
  - Context and Research Questions ............................................................................................... 2
  - Organization of the Dissertation ............................................................................................. 12
  - Central Concepts ..................................................................................................................... 15
  - Main Arguments ...................................................................................................................... 19
  - Research Objectives and Study Design ................................................................................... 22
  - Proposed Contributions ........................................................................................................... 23
  - Summary of Dissertation Objectives ....................................................................................... 23

**Chapter 2 Contextualizing Indigenous Demands for Education: An Historical Overview** ................................................................................................................................. 26
  - Introduction ............................................................................................................................. 26
  - Decolonizing History and Education ...................................................................................... 28
    - History since 1524: Contact and invasion of the Spanish meets the resistance of the Maya ................................................................................................................................................. 30
    - Education postindependence (1821) ................................................................................ 32
  - The Maya Movement ............................................................................................................... 41
  - Integration of Issues and Legal Frameworks to Address the Multiplicity of Factors Affecting Education ................................................................................................................................. 48
  - Implications of Diverse Actors in Education: Towards an Indigenous Model of Education ........................................................................................................................................ 52
  - Further Thoughts ..................................................................................................................... 55
Chapter 3 Roots of the Ceiba: Contextualizing an Indigenous Decolonizing Theoretical Framework

Contextualizing Indigenous Peoples and Indigeneity .......................................................... 58
Who Are Indigenous Peoples? ............................................................................................... 59
Grounding Indigenous Decolonizing Theories ...................................................................... 63
My Engagement With Indigenous Maya Knowledge in Education ................................. 68
Theories That Support Decolonizing and Indigenous Frameworks ..................................... 72
  Anticolonialism and Indigenous decolonizing frameworks .............................................. 74
  Anticolonial theoretical aspects of IDT ............................................................................ 75
  Postcolonialism and IDT .............................................................................................. 77
Theoretical Implications of IDT for Gender and Nation Building in Education ............. 79
Concluding Remarks: Theory, Analysis, and Application of the Concept of Jun Winaq’ ......................................................................................................................... 88

Chapter 4 The Branches (Methodology and Method) ......................................................... 92
Introduction ......................................................................................................................... 92
Values of the Ceiba Inherent in Maya Cosmology ............................................................. 93
The Research Question and Underlying Assumptions ....................................................... 97
  Researcher in relation to research .................................................................................. 98
  Choosing a geographical context: Guatemala City ....................................................... 100
  The participant selection process: Cooperation and giving thanks ......................... 101
  Balance and MIE in relation to Indigenous women ...................................................... 102
  Reciprocity as part of a learning, observing, and creating community ....................... 105
Secondary Literature Review and Policy Documents in situ ........................................... 107
Conversations and Involvement to Identify Participants .................................................. 108
Data Analysis: Stories as Meaning .................................................................................... 110
  Negotiating meaning ................................................................................................... 114
  Deciding on themes to discuss .................................................................................... 115
List of Figures

Figure 1. Tree of Life in the Dresden Codex, illustrating the Maize God Naal as it connects the spiritual to the material world. Image used with permission of Linda Schele and FAMSI........................................................................................................................ 1

Figure 2. National Congress on Maya Education 2007. Photo by author......................... 26

Figure 3. Hierarchical/colonial positioning of races in Guatemala. ................................. 34


Figure 5. Grandmother Moon, Ixchel. Image used with permission of the University of Arizona................................................................................................................................ 123

Figure 6. Photograph of a weaving of the First Four Women and Men. Used with permission from María Alicia Telón. ......................................................................................................................... 136

Figure 7. Maya Grandmothers preparing for a Maya Ceremony. Photo by author........... 167

Figure 8. Maya education model based on Ceiba/Tree of Life. ........................................ 255
List of Appendices

Appendix A Interview Guide .................................................................................................................. 277

Appendix B List of Acronyms ........................................................................................................... 279
Chapter 1
Introduction

Figure 1. Tree of Life in the Dresden Codex, illustrating the Maize God Naal as it connects the spiritual to the material world. Image used with permission of Linda Schele and FAMSI.

Introduction

Ixim Ulew (Guatemala) is a diverse country where the Maya, who are divided by 21 language groups, comprise at least 60% of the total population (Tzian, 1994, p. 82). The other Indigenous groups represented are the Xinka and Afro-descendant Garífuna. Also, there are the mestizos or mixed-blood peoples, and the ladinos,\(^1\) who are a minority but control most of the political, economic, and social power (see Tzian, 1994).

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\(^1\) The term ladino refers to Spanish descendants. It is specifically used in Guatemala to erase any link to Indigenous identity and heritage. Similarly, mestizo refers to mixed-blood people who, in addition to having Spanish blood, also have Indigenous blood. Even though originally ladinos were seen as having more Spanish blood than mestizos, both terms erase Indigenous identity and are used interchangeably today. It is not similar to the distinction of Métis peoples in Canada, whereby there is an acceptance that their mixed ancestry of Indigenous and non-Indigenous gave rise to a new Nation of Indigenous peoples: the Métis Nation. For further illustration of the
In this Chapter, I outline the context and research questions in the dissertation. This context helps the reader understand the main thesis, arguments, methods and objectives, intended contributions, and organization of the dissertation. I end the section with a summary of the objectives of the dissertation.

**Context and Research Questions**

Indigenous peoples in Guatemala have never had a place to negotiate with the state the issues pertaining to land and territories. Not having any treaties to rely on has made discussing any issues with government difficult. However, Maya Indigenous groups have historically made alliances with the political left in an effort to participate in social transformation, albeit with very little gains regarding specific Indigenous issues, such as political participation, repatriation of stolen objects and land claims (Adams, 1995; C. Smith, 1998; Pittawanak, 2005). The history of the left in Guatemala is complex. On the one hand, it has provided some benefits to rural Indigenous peoples in the form of agrarian reforms, particularly during the presidency of socialist president Juan José Arévalo in 1944. Notwithstanding the participation and support by Indigenous peoples, the left intelligentsia has dominated the political arena. As a result, the demands of Indigenous peoples have been left in the background. However, in 1996, there was hope that a new relationship with the government could be established. The state and civil society (led by the left) signed the Peace Accords (PAs) that ended a 36-year civil war. It marked the beginning of the participation of Indigenous peoples in the political processes aimed at the debated process of democratizing the country and bringing peace.

The PAs provide some guidelines regarding the sociopolitical and economic conditions the State needs to address in order to attain peace. Of particular relevance for the field of education is the Treaty on Indigenous Nations’ Identity and Rights, Acuerdo sobre Identidad y Derecho de los Pueblos Indígenas (AIDPI in Spanish). This treaty is a section in the PAs that mandates the right of all “Guatemalans” to receive an education in their own language and appropriate to their culture. It provides hope that a new education system based on diversity could be established. Yet, in spite of several promises and legislation that supports its
implementation, the education system is still based on a “Western, ethnocentric and mono-
linguistic model that systematically excludes the large and diverse majority of Indigenous
peoples” (CNEM, 2004; CNEM, 2002, 54).

At best, the government has implemented educational policies that have progressed from
Indigenismo during the 1920s to the 1970s, a policy aimed at achieving cultural unity through
Indigenous peoples’ social integration and assimilation (de la Peña, 2005; FAES, 2007).
Indigenismo is also characterized by an increase in knowledge produced about the idealized
These social constructions and developments fostered the Guatemalan governments’ policies on
bilingual education (EB), which later became intercultural bilingual education (EBI) as a result
of the rise of Indigenous intellectuals who began to publicly advocate for the rights of
Indigenous peoples since the 1970s and which culminated with the creation of the Maya
movement in the 1980s (Morales López & Bá Tziul, 2009). Further, efforts by international
agencies in conjunction with the government have resulted in teaching practices promoted by
pilot projects, such as UNESCO’s project Mobilization for Maya Education (Grigsby, 2004).
This teaching practice is described as a Maya Bilingual and Intercultural Education model
(EMBI) that has yet to catch the financial and political support of the government (Grigsby,
2004).

The EMBI model, as an example of the government’s attempt to include Maya
Indigenous knowledge in its contents, still lacks elements rooted in Indigenous knowledge in
general. A clear example of this omission is the exclusion of gender and gender balance in the
contents of this reform, either from a feminist stance or from an Indigenous perspective. In this
context, it becomes even more challenging to articulate women’s participation in the context of
Indigenous knowledge. It becomes clear that more efforts need to focus on questioning why
Maya women and Grandmother’s knowledge continue to lie at the margins of this process even
as Maya people struggle to reclaim and develop a system based on Maya epistemology (Morales,
June 19, 2007; Vásquez, February 15, 2007; Ventura, June 19, 2007). Maya philosophy honors
women as bearers of life and keepers of knowledge. It acknowledges that without women, no
balance would exist. As such, while the creation of an education system that is epistemologically
and linguistically relevant to the peoples of Guatemala is a matter of critical importance, it is
even more so for Indigenous women and girls. It is equally important to reclaim and put into practice positive concepts and philosophies from all cultures that currently coexist in Guatemala.

My observations and concerns about the invisibility of Indigenous philosophies in the academy increased as I encountered limited or no Indigenous perspectives on education within the field of Latin American studies. Particularly alarming is the limited engagement with Indigenous philosophies and views on gender balance and relations. Thus, my dissertation represents an effort to critically examine the challenges that prevent the research from Indigenous views, values and praxis of Maya philosophy. My research asks: Are there agreements about the pedagogic approaches and contents appropriate for an Indigenous education that can recognize and support the autonomous development of culturally and linguistically distinct groups without privileging one over the others? Through this question, I address the impact of colonization on gender relations, citizenship, and nation building. In this context, Indigeneity becomes a politicized space where Indigenous knowledge and peoples are represented in a positive light.

Therefore, in an effort to engage Indigenous propositions for critically analyzing the current education system, this dissertation also investigates the extent of the contributions of Maya peoples to educational reform on those three issues both within the system, through educational reform, and outside of the system, through Maya education. Further, understanding the role that education plays in knowledge production requires analysis of the role of lived experience, as well as genetic and collective memory, for the survival of Indigenous peoples and knowledges. I center participants’ stories and my own observations because they conceptually weave together in a concerted effort to build a better future for younger generations of all cultural groups. Here, I call this process becoming Jun Winaq’.

*Jun Winaq’* is a concept that emanates from the K’iche’ word *jun*, which translates as “one”, and *winaq’,* which translates as “being.” Therefore, the concept alludes to the process of becoming whole, or a complete being. The discussion is further illustrated in Chapter 3, where I center a research participant’s understanding of this process through his explanation of the Maya numeric system, which relies on numbers one to twenty (Wuqub’ Iq’, May 24, 2007). The foundational elements in becoming whole are not only applicable to the construction of gender
and racialized identities. *Jun Winaq’* is inextricably tied to processes of constructing national identities based on spiritual understandings that surpass alliances to material constructs. In other words, given the complicities between nationalist discourses founded upon colonial myths of democracy (Grande, 2004; A. Smith, 2007, 2008) and the exclusion of Indigenous forms of organizing and self-determination, the *Jun Winaq’* is also a useful unit of analysis in critical reflection upon the disadvantaged positions in which most Indigenous members of society find themselves. It is a political and spiritual undertaking that assumes that the nation and its citizens are accountable not only to human beings and the material world, but also to the universe in all of its complexity. This issue is further discussed in Chapter 7.

Through this process, conceptualizations of citizenship, gender and educational processes are reconstructed to reflect Maya Indigenous knowledge and epistemology. This methodology is informed by my theoretical framework, which is described in detail in Chapter 4. Through this lens, I posit that the proposals made for educational reform, from 1996 onwards, recommend an education that moves Indigenous peoples and their demands from discourse to praxis. Moreover, they not only seek to benefit Indigenous peoples but all peoples. Hence, my dissertation aims to identify characteristics of Indigenous education that make it unique and that also privilege Indigenous knowledges in their own right, while seeing it as able to engage with other Western modalities on its own theoretical ground.

**Self-location and research**

Following L. T. Smith (1999) and Graveline (1998), I reclaim my voice and history as a decolonizing act that connects me directly to the research I am conducting. It provides a window for the reader to look into what counts as Indigenous research. To determine this, an evaluation of the motivations and goals for conducting research and its benefits to Indigenous Maya peoples needs to happen. In this sense, it echoes L. T. Smith’s (1999) claim that Indigenous research, in her case, Maori, can be conducted by Maori people only if they are pro-Maori. In turn, Maori research can also be conducted by non-Maori as long as they are working alongside pro-Maori Maoris (p. 184).
As a Maya woman who grew up in an urban setting, I have understood that the parameters and static definitions of both identities, Indigenous and mestizo, are stuck in a dialectical gridlock whereby issues of power determine the way in which one group relates to the other. On the one hand, I have encountered many Indigenous Maya who abide by a strict colonial definition that holds cultural markers, such as clothing and language, as the only determinants of belonging. On the other hand, there are others who understand the complexity of colonization and thus of the Maya, who are diverse. At the interplay of these complex issues are the Western philosophical foundations of an education system that has historically erased or stereotyped Indigenous peoples and knowledge. Indigenous Maya peoples are aware of the political, spiritual, material and social dimensions that connect those of us who are pro-Maya on levels that enable our culture to survive and thrive in diverse ways.

Maya culture has survived because of the languages and cultural and spiritual practices that continue to thrive in an age of globalization and assimilation. While I do not disclaim the importance of Indigenous languages and visual identifiers for the survival of the culture, I critically analyze how diverse experiences of engagement with colonization over time has resulted in varied ways of constructing Indigenous Maya identities. This critical stance nuances the aforementioned set of static set of identity markers. Characteristics of Indigenous Maya peoples have changed over time due to consensual and forced blood mixing, national and international migration, religious affiliations, diverse economic and political influence and affluence. These factors challenge the simplistic colonial definitions of Indigenous identity espoused by Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike. Maya Jakalteco scholar Victor Montejo (2005) suggests that the narrow framing of identity construction prevents the mestizos from considering themselves as Indigenous Maya. Likewise, some Maya cannot identify with Indigenous Maya who do not hold similar experiences to theirs, and thus a temporal distance separates the mestizos from the Indigenous. These constructed divisions between the ancient and contemporary Maya justify celebrating the Maya past while vilifying the present Maya (see Casaús-Arzú, 1992; Cojtí Cuxil 2005; Hale, 2004). Further, as the Indigenous Maya once again rise politically from the ashes of the genocide and erasure experienced since the Spanish invaded Maya territories in 1524, the government continues to ensure the Guatemalan population maintains the “mestizo ideal” (Hale, 2004, 17) through its assimilation policies and subtle regulation of social relations.
This stalemate between the distinct experiences of Indigenous identity and the creation of a Mestizo population benefits the government as it also continues to juxtapose the “state ideologies of mestizaje [through] the continued existence of the Indian Other” (Hale, 2004, 17) and uses this label to determine if a person is included or excluded from the benefits of citizenship. Some of the rewards include accessing state education to learn how to improve one’s economic opportunities by virtue of “creat[ing] subjects who govern themselves in accordance with the logic of globalized capitalism” (Hale, 2004, 17). Again, the state benefits from this racialized division, particularly because the governing system is based on a single definition of a citizen intrinsically connected to racialized hierarchies that have economically and politically benefited the criollo (direct Spanish descendants) that make up the majority of the Guatemalan Ladino elite class. Because I did not encounter the opportunity to discuss in depth the role colonization has played into changing many Maya peoples who now believe are mestizos through miscegenation, I opted for not delving further into the subject. I also found limited opportunities to discuss the fluidity and adaptability of all cultures without losing their defining characteristics. In spite of the limited discussions, I found throughout the research process the correlation between education and constructing a homogeneous, law-abiding citizenry.

As a result of this genocide, I began my experience outside of Maya territory. I left with my parents to find refuge in the United States in 1984. We fled the violence of a war that ravaged the country for over 36 years—particularly in the countryside where my relatives live. Later, in 1988, I immigrated to Hamilton, Ontario, Canada. There I studied in a Catholic High School, continuing to adhere to the only religion I knew, not aware of the damage Catholicism and colonialism had inflicted upon Indigenous peoples across Turtle Island and the Americas. As Boler and Zembylas (2003) assert, “‘truth hurts’ … especially if it challenges our deeply embedded emotional dimensions that frame and shape our daily habits, routines and unconscious complicity with hegemony” (p. 112). Correspondingly, I had to challenge my own assumptions regarding the primacy of the Catholic religion and its tendency to subtly promote racism, heterosexism, Zionism, and exclusions based on the demonization of “othered” spiritualities and cultures. Moreover, I also had to deal with my “Guatemalan”, mixed-blood identity and go deep within to analyze how denying my Indigenous identity had a profound effect on how Indigenous knowledge and peoples are excluded from participating and contributing to knowledge creation for education. I had to question how a mere celebration of difference does not fully address
“systemic institutional, educational, and economic discrimination” (Boler & Zembylas, 2003, pp. 112–113).

As a new immigrant in Canada, I also began to feel social exclusions. I felt the racism at its core, but never really pushed my inquiry into the complexities of interlocking systems of oppression in which the intensity of repressions shift depending on which one is salient at a particular time. I began to notice that even among other recent immigrants, including others from Latin America, a certain level of uneasiness and distance always prevailed between us. I began to analyze what made me different and I realized my phenotypical features, especially my brown skin, and further, my way of thinking and being, instigated a certain reaction from those immigrants who had lighter skin. I began to realize the impact of living in patriarchal, colonial contexts that privilege able-bodiedness, heterosexuality, economic consumption and waste, Whiteness, and Christianity. I realized the violence and injustice committed against people who defy these “norms” crossed boundaries. Racism and exclusion exist everywhere. I stayed in this wounded state, not realizing my story had much in common with Aboriginal peoples in Canada. A process of centering justice and trying to heal from the anger and sadness I carry has helped me focus on ways to walk in a “good way.” Reconnecting to the transformative power of my own Indigenous Maya knowledge allowed me to see the connections I needed to use writing and research to heal.

Through my own healing, I started to become aware of the colonial processes that have led many people to deny their roots and reap the rewards of becoming part of the imagined majority of non-Indigenous people. This behavior is rooted in deep colonial wounds that have not healed. If we, as human beings, do not acknowledge this hurt and each person’s responsibility to transform to promote justice and peace across differences, the human race continue to harm each other and all of our relations found in the universe. My research illustrates how communities are engaging in efforts to overcome the vestiges of the neocolonial, imperial system that only values material accumulation and power over others. One of these efforts occurred when I reconnected with Indigenous peoples from various nations in Toronto. I raise this issue because it this context informs the position from which I write this dissertation: a connection to place.
Connecting to place implies that Indigenous peoples across the world, including Maya communities, base their understanding of connections to land and territory, of identity and belonging, upon the relationships created with the land (Hermes, 1998). In Guatemala, my grandmother’s lineage directs my sense of belonging in spite of the physical distance between the Mayab’ and Turtle Island, which is where I currently reside. And yet, this is what connects me. My umbilical chord is there and thus, my responsibilities as a Maya woman begin to thread themselves from that place. Understanding my relationship to the various territories where I have lived, the experiences I and others have had with colonizing education and the transformative power of Indigenous knowledge at a global level facilitated my decision to draw from Indigenous scholars who have advanced research and literature on these issues. Although most of these scholars write from the context of living in English-speaking former British colonies (the United States, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, some African countries), the broader political, social and cultural issues apply to the context in Guatemala.

I decided to write a dissertation about the possibility of decolonizing the education system in Guatemala due to increasing evidence that the Western education model does not work. Examples of this inability to provide quality education to all, and particularly to Indigenous groups, abound. For example, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNCHR) reported in 2009 that “In urban areas, 91 per cent of non-indigenous males are literate versus 75 per cent of the indigenous males; 86 per cent of urban non-indigenous females are literate, compared to just 55 per cent of urban indigenous women” (UNCHR, 2009). Although these figures are situated within a Western discourse of what economic and social development means, such as material wealth and school access, the issues are not abstract. My grandmother fits within this statistic. There is a correlation between the limited educational access for Indigenous peoples, who mostly live in rural areas and the increased access for those who identify as non-Indigenous and live in urban areas. It becomes obvious that my chances at accessing education increased given my family’s decision to live in the city and assimilate into dominant society. Although I am a product of a Eurocentric education that perpetuates the myth that “authentic” Indigenous peoples are static and defined by one fixed set of characteristics, I acknowledge the fluidity of culture (Hall, 1997), and I have found my connection to Indigenous Maya culture and have chosen to uphold it, respect it and protect it.
Through a critical analysis of my own experience with identity formation and educational access, I have come to see how this dichotomy of authentic versus assimilated Indigenous peoples connects those of us who share a history of assimilation through colonization and decolonization. I have been inspired by scholars who contest that “pure” Indigenous peoples have vanished and that in turn, present-day Indigenous peoples represent a minority that romanticizes an idyllic past (Cojti Ren, 2006). Maya history has been misrepresented and “is one of racial discrimination and degrading colonial representations of our people. Such racist and colonial history was used and continues to be used to justify land expropriation and relocation and assimilation of Indigenous people today” (Montejo, 1999, as cited in Cojti Ren, 2006, p. 8). Colonial education has played a large role in upholding these beliefs. Thus, as a site of transformation, education also creates the possibility of envisioning a different way of life. Through affirming the self and directing Indigenous scholars’ energies towards building a future based on the positive aspects of Indigenous cultures, Indigenous Maya peoples have the chance to begin to again walk in a good way. This is my hope.

Many people in Guatemala believe the static universal definition of who is an Indigenous person. Through these some might ignore or choose to ignore their Indigenous roots. Others, like the participants in the study, have never had an issue with defining their identity. Regardless of their position, it is clear that the education system and the social constructions based on the discourses produced inform the various definitions of Indigenous identity in Guatemala today.

My position throughout this dissertation is that through an analysis of colonial history and its implications for identity formation, nation building, and citizenship, Indigenous scholars can critically inform, and perhaps change the static and often simplistic definitions regarding Indigenous identity and Indigeneity today. It is a vision of hope that seeks the reclamation and praxis of Maya ancestral knowledge and past, particularly as pertains to analyzing the gendered nature of knowledge. Moreover, since education and research have historically represented sites where colonization thrives, these sites can also become spaces where transformation can occur (Battiste, 1998; L. T. Smith, 1999, 2005).
Decolonization

The foundational pillars of education in Guatemala are colonial, and define, guide and uphold the Western education system available in Ixim Ulew today. Indeed, Maya academics such as Victor Montejo (2005), Demetrio Cojtí (1998, 2005, 2009), Emilio del Valle Escalante (2009) and Blanca Estela Alvarado and Carlos Jacinto Coz (2003) have also echoed the view that this education system is mostly responsible for the production and consumption of a single definition of Indigenous identity, which superficially divides Indigenous from non-Indigenous peoples and perpetuates racism, discrimination, and other forms of state-sponsored violence. The genocide responsible for the murder of over 200,000 people from 1960–1996 through the internal civil war conflict\(^2\) (REHMI, 1999) provides recent evidence of this state-sponsored ideology and violence.

The decolonization of educational institutions, given their highly colonial and imperial nature, necessitate understanding the colonial history of research for the purpose of creating expert knowledge about Indigenous peoples (L. T. Smith, 2005). Therefore, the validation of multiple centers of knowledge is an area I focus on. I also demonstrate ways in which the transmission of this knowledge and Indigenous languages can provide some tools through which Indigenous Maya students who may or may not be aware of Maya teachings, theories and perspectives can actually critically reflect upon the philosophy and the praxis of this knowledge. As Indigenous Maya educators, academics and students, we can only attain this by moving away from cultural frameworks that celebrate Indigenous peoples as folklore and, instead, illustrate the political dimension of Maya ways of being. Therefore, the reclamation and praxis of Indigenous knowledge, as expressed through Maya cultural and spiritual practices, challenge the status quo and demand Indigenous peoples’ right to self-determination. My work is part of the demand to “share control over their research” (L. T. Smith, 1999, 191).

A discussion on the dimensions and goals of decolonization, as it is taken up in the dissertation, can help the reader gage if the research presented here aims to support Maya Indigenous struggles for justice and self-determination in Guatemala. My work mainly engages

\(^{2}\) During the most violent period of the Guatemalan civil war (1980–1983) some (conservative) accounts estimate over 200,000 deaths and the displacement of more than 1 million people (see ODHAG, 1999).
critically analyzing knowledge production in the context of education in Guatemala. The process of creating knowledge links issues of identity formation and claims for the purpose of determining an individual’s motivation for conducting research. Claiming an Indigenous Maya identity does not always result in producing knowledge and conducting research that benefits or supports Indigenous struggles for self-determination. My own decolonizing position regarding knowledge produced in the academy rejects the notion that the expert knowledge created in the academy represents the only perspective of the heterogeneous and distinct Indigenous groups that exist.

This brief discussion offers the underlying assumptions for the dissertation. This introductory chapter also outlines the context and research questions of the research. It outlines the main arguments, including an explanation of the general objectives. These objectives include:

1. advancing general understandings of Maya Indigenous peoples and knowledge;

2. contributing to Indigenous knowledge production, particularly using Indigenous theoretical and discursive frameworks;

3. developing and applying contextually relevant Indigenous research methodologies.

**Organization of the Dissertation**

Chapter 1, as already noted, outlines the context and research questions in the dissertation. It presents the main thesis, arguments, methods and objectives, intended contributions, and organization of the dissertation.

Chapter 2 provides an historical overview that contextualizes Indigenous demands for education. It considers key moments in the history of Guatemala that defined Maya identity through colonial lenses and institutions. It also demonstrates how Indigenous Maya peoples have survived state attempts of erasure from history through the diverse praxis of Maya Indigenous knowledge. The focus of the Chapter is to illustrate how the construction of state narratives about
Indigenous peoples and identity mainly served the purpose of validating the dominance of the *ladino* elite. The maintenance of these meta-narratives has affected the manner in which Indigenous peoples in Guatemala have come to see themselves and others.

The role of education in the dissemination of these ideas continues to impact the relationship Indigenous peoples have had with the Eurocentric state since the founding of the Guatemalan nation in 1821. However, the chapter illustrates how education is also a site that can potentially dispel and re-right (L. T. Smith, 1999) history from Indigenous lenses through illustrating the strength and vibrancy of Indigenous peoples to overcome many challenges. In this regard, although a political analysis of history or of the social relations of power is beyond the scope of the dissertation, I do address the issues that have led to the current struggles and negotiations with the state. Different political forces throughout Guatemala’s history have led Indigenous peoples to the negotiating table. The blood spilled by many martyrs who fought for the rights of Indigenous peoples and the struggles over land and their intersections with other Indigenous peoples’ efforts to reclaim land, territory, language, culture, and spirituality make the negotiations to improve the education system possible today.

Chapter 3 provides one of my contributions to Indigenous studies. Specifically, it adds to the increasing literature on Indigenous theories, perspectives, and knowledge. In this chapter, I review and build on anticolonial theories (Fanon, 1967; Ghandi, 1968; Memmi, 1991; Said, 1978; wa Thiong’o, 1986) alongside Indigenous discursive frameworks (Dei, 2011) to propose an Indigenous decolonizing theoretical framework. I suggest that these two theoretical positions complement each other in the analysis of the stories shared in this dissertation. I further review and broadly explain where Western and academic feminisms converge and diverge in my study. I posit that academia is increasingly validating Indigenous knowledge while simultaneously marginalizing it. I illustrate how this is done and argue for the importance of validating Indigenous theories. Academics and researchers should have the freedom to construct and choose from theories that are pertinent and useful to their analyses (Kovack, 2009). I aim to illustrate that Indigenous theories are relevant for Indigenous and non-Indigenous academics who choose to frame their work within decolonizing approaches and concepts. Since theory and methodology go hand in hand, in Chapter 4 I present and discuss Indigenous research methodologies and the methods utilized for this work.
My contributions to the field of Indigenous studies, particularly on education, knowledge production, women, and nation building, are discussed in my findings in Chapters 5–7. In Chapter 5, I discuss the pedagogical implications of re-centering Ancestral knowledge in education, particularly focusing on the validity of both Grandmother’s and Grandfather’s knowledge. I include both genders in the discussion as an effort to illustrate through real life examples how these teachings form part of the research participants’ daily praxis. Chapter 5 also reviews particular aspects of Indigenous, anticolonial, and liberal feminisms to illustrate convergences and divergences among woman-centered and Indigenous feminist analyses. It also brings out the possibility of reconfiguring the Western concept of gender with that of Jun Winaq’ in an effort to decenter what Sandy Grande (2003) describes as “Whitestream” feminist discourses, which are “not only dominated by white women but also principally structured on the basis of white, middle-class experience; a discourse that serves their ethno-political interests and capital investments” (p. 330).

Chapter 6 further grounds the metaphysical dimensions of Indigenous Maya knowledge in its discussion about the role of the Lunar Maya Calendar in education: the Tzolk’in. I posit that the Maya Calendar is a tool for reclaiming ancient forms of education and defining leadership. I demonstrate that Indigenous education, with its focus on spirituality, has the potential to foster a new kind of leadership and citizens. These Indigenous citizens can build a new nation for all the peoples in Guatemala.

In Chapter 7, I describe in detail the potential MIE has to build strong new citizens of a Maya Nation by positing the creation of a new kind of citizen. It builds on discussions that center the possibility to achieve self-determination, as posited by Jakaltek Maya scholar Victor Montejo (2003); K’iche’ Maya scholars Demetrio Cojtí Cuxil, Elsa Son Chonay and Demetrio Rodriguez Guaján (2007). In my discussion, I posit that one element which merits further discussion is the centrality of Creator and Maya philosophy in peoples’ daily interactions with one another and in the treatment of the universe. Thus, citizenship makes everyone accountable for his or her actions in ways that transcend worldly policing of people’s behaviors through laws and legislation alone. This goes hand in hand with the Indigenous axiology that says that human beings and the universe are all interdependent and that we must work together to maintain balance.
In Chapter 8, I review the contributions made to the field. I also bring forward some points for further discussion of the implications of bringing Indigenous voices and knowledge into education—whether as part of the public, state-funded education system or as a system on its own. I hope to spark the interest of policy makers, researchers, funding institutions, and educational administrators in the argument that Indigenous Maya knowledge can provide alternatives to foster equity and balance in the 21st century. Its potential derives from its holistic view of the world and respect for difference, and its demand for accountability to a force that is greater than institutions or other people: Creator. Moreover, recognizing the knowledge of our knowledge keepers challenges the current assumptions about who is an expert in Indigenous knowledge and the credentials he or she must have.

**Central Concepts**

As a contemporary Maya woman, I am aware of the importance of relationships. In Maya Indigenous Knowledge (MIK), an understanding of balance is required for any good relationship to exist; balance in relationships requires reciprocity and respect. From the notion of building good relationships, MIK promotes an understanding that one part of a whole cannot exist without the other parts, making interdependence an important aspect of Maya and other Indigenous cultures. Further, Maya understandings of time and space, in relation to all life, are embodied in the concept of the Ceiba: a metaphor with pedagogical implications that helps illustrate contemporary connections to the past, present, and future. Sacred documents, such as the Dresden Codex\(^3\) (see Figure 1), demonstrate its importance within Maya culture past and present, particularly when discussing issues of social justice.

\(^3\) The Dresden Codex (a.k.a. *Codex Dresdensis*) is a pre-Columbian Maya book of the 11th or 12th century of the Yucatecan Maya in Chichén Itzá. The Maya codex is believed to be a copy of an original text from some 300–400 years earlier. Historians say it is the earliest known book written in the Americas (See S. P. Bracamonte, 2004 for a detailed historical analysis of the book showing that it contains important historical accounts of Maya resistance and organization predating conquest in the Yucatan region). For more information, see the Northwestern University’s digital library at [http://digital.library.northwestern.edu/codex/background.html](http://digital.library.northwestern.edu/codex/background.html) and also FAMSI at [http://www.famsi.org/mayawriting/codices/pdf/dresden_fors_schele_all.pdf](http://www.famsi.org/mayawriting/codices/pdf/dresden_fors_schele_all.pdf)
Figure 1 shows the Ceiba emerging from the sacrificed body of the Maize God Naal and the Milky Way or Sac B’e. For the Maya, Sac B’e represents the path between the Earth, Heaven, and the Underworld. It shows the interdependence of material and non-material worlds in a metaphor that also illustrates the value and application of knowledge from the past into the present. Given its relevance to Maya spiritual and cultural knowledge, it also illustrates the constant interaction between the material and spiritual worlds, between time and space. This dissertation emphasizes these relationships and seeks to illustrate in a general way how the teachings of our Maya Grandmothers and Grandfathers are still remembered and lived out today. In order to advance and nuance general understandings of Maya peoples today, it is important to highlight that Maya Grandmothers and Grandfathers are understood not only as blood relatives but also, in a metaphoric sense, as the ancestors. From my own observations on the field and throughout my life, and also from the narratives of the participants, it is possible to generalize that for contemporary Maya peoples, notions of kinship resemble that of Navajo peoples, who also understand grandparents as “those who behave as grandmothers [sic] [and Grandfathers] should, whether or not they actually have biological grandchildren of their own or whether they are associated with the maternal or paternal side of the family” (Hedlund, 1999, as cited in McCloskey, 2007, p. 54). Therefore, Maya Indigenous peoples today still carry this teaching and understanding of our ancestors.

This dissertation centers the participants’ life stories, especially as they pertain to their experiences in education both in childhood and in their present work. Analyzing documents and participants’ stories through Indigenous theoretical perspectives, I demonstrate that it is Indigenous ancestral knowledge that guides the participants’ efforts to build an Indigenous education system in spite of all the challenges they face. Their daily praxis and the negotiation between their personal, community, and work relationships is an important aspect to consider as I propose that these aspects of Maya Indigenous knowledge are central to Maya Indigenous Education (MIE), particularly, the understanding of Jun Winaq’ through its notion of balance. Given the gendered nature of Indigenous knowledges and its potential applications, I illustrate three dimensions of balance: gender, cultural practices and nation building.

These aspects, however, are not without tensions and contradictions. In order to critically engage MIE, it is also necessary to show the contradictions between theory and praxis; no culture
is free from oppressions. In spite of Indigenous peoples’ histories and common experiences with colonization, there is also an understanding that everyone is implicated in maintaining the relationship between colonizer and colonized through the acceptance and adherence to the roles assigned to both (see Ghandi, 1998, as cited in Shahjahan, 2005, p. 219; Memmi, 1991). MIE is a site where one can witness both the maintenance of colonizer–colonized dichotomies and “our capacity to project ourselves onto our own existence” (Mazama, 1998, as cited in Shahjahan, 2005, p. 220). Using the *Jun Winaq*’ as a measure and guide to determine the futures of Maya Indigenous peoples is but one dimension of decolonizing education and, if I may say, of ourselves as human beings.

I hope to respectfully acknowledge the importance of the participant’s stories and their relevance to Indigenous contemporary struggles while simultaneously providing space for their voices to come through the text. In this I aim to reveal how Indigenous knowledge and, specifically, how Maya Grandmother’s Knowledge (GK), alongside Grandfather’s Knowledge (GF), guides their actions in their community, family, and professional lives. In their efforts to decolonize education, they also demonstrate that some types of Western education are also useful and resemble Indigenous education. These modalities include adult, community, and rights education based on Paulo Freire’s (1972) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

Although there are similarities between these Western models of education, it becomes evident that their philosophical underpinnings exclude spirituality and any analysis of colonization. Their rhetoric is grounded on material Marxist analysis and individual human rights discourses that often highlight the divergence from Indigenous education because there is simply no room to discuss or engage with non-Western centers of knowledge. In other words, Marxist analysis has historically left out the spiritual dimensions of any system it analyzes, and therein lies one of the limits of these particular education models (Grande, 2004). Therefore, when I discuss education, I refer to a dominant education that seeks to assimilate students into the normalized identity of the ideal citizen based on material historical analyses of the world in which there is no room or value attributed to Indigenous peoples (Bishop, 2003). I further discuss the convergences and divergences in the chapter on the theoretical framework, when I address the epistemological basis for Indigenous education.
Spiritual practices and ceremony are, and always has been, intrinsic to Maya culture. The stories here provide a forum through which to discuss how MIE goes beyond a material, class-gender-race equality analysis to include some elements and concepts of Maya culture still practiced today. These are not discussed fully given the need to protect this knowledge from being appropriated, and also, given the need to discuss these with Elders in more communities. However, the elements shared herein do reflect the application of foundational aspects of Indigenous Maya knowledge found in the one of the Maya calendars, the Tzolk’in. Based on this conceptual framework, I posit that MIE is based instead on the Indigenous epistemological position that centers remembering, reclaiming, promoting, and guiding future generations based on our connections with Creator. It also centers the knowledge of women, or Grandmother’s knowledge (GK), alongside Grandfather’s knowledge.

Again, the placement of GK alongside Grandfather’s Knowledge demonstrates that Maya philosophical approaches to power relations are horizontal. This differs greatly from the hierarchical Western power and knowledge grids, where one type of knowledge has more value than the next. The Western viewpoint automatically privileges one gender over the other, one race over another, ability over disability, adult over child, human over nature. Instead, Maya philosophy exemplifies a parity and complementarity through the concept of becoming Jun Winaq’, which literally translates into “Complete Being” in Maya K’ich’e language. This concept illustrates that Maya culture is holistic and that it values all elements in relationship to one another. It also acknowledges that we are all beings on a journey towards becoming whole and balanced (Camey Huz, et al, 2006, p. 25). Balance, in this sense, generates the parameters from which to analyze whether justice and equality exist. Its absence indicates an ailment—whether in a person’s body or as a society—that needs attention, reflection, and transformation. The Jun Winaq’ offers this possibility.

Another area I engage in this dissertation is the pedagogical implications of nation building and citizenship through Indigenous lenses. I come to this theme based on my own understandings of the metaphor of the Ceiba. The metaphor illustrates our relationship and accountability to all beings, the need to support all life in the universe and not only through human-made laws and political and jurisdictional boundaries and territories. In this sense, I
follow and expand on concepts such as that of a people nation (S. R. Lyons, 2000) and universal citizenship (Arabena, 2008).

It will become clear that I engage gender in this dissertation as an effort to dialogue with various forms of feminisms. I engage gender through the conceptualizations found in Maya culture, particularly those derived from the process of becoming Jun Winaq’ through complementarity (Curruchich Gómez, 2000). Complementarity functions as a central element in the discussions of the nature and value of relationships between women and men. I show that the horizontal aspects of Maya culture become evident through an analysis of power differentials between genders, from the perspective of decolonization. The stories shared here, as well as my own observations and lived experiences, suggest that these power differentials are a phenomenon that can refute the stereotype that Indigenous cultures in general are sexist. While I am not denying the presence of gender discrimination in Guatemala, in general, and within Maya culture specifically, I follow other Indigenous scholars in suggesting that this power hierarchy is directly related to modernity and the philosophical foundations of Eurocentrism—with its competing views of modernity (Battiste, 1986, 1998, 2000a, 2000c; Little Bear 2000; Mohanty, 2003; L. T. Smith, 1999, 2005, Youngblood Henderson, 2000). Maya concepts of gender balance or equality are a philosophical ideal to strive for, one that is deeply rooted in Indigenous cultures.

**Main Arguments**

This dissertation argues that Indigenous peoples’ exclusion from education is twofold. First, Indigenous peoples are represented as being less than human and thus, “the humanities have been linked with European traditions as the source and foundation for university knowledge” (Battiste, 2004, p. 7). Moreover, “in each of the disciplinary traditions, colonial humanities have taken up aspects of Aboriginal traditions in fragmented forms … [and] the new challenge [is] to bring Humpty Dumpty of Indigenous Humanities back together again” (Battiste, 2004, p. 7). A proposition is that, in order to piece Indigenous communities back together, individual members need to heal through reclaiming and living by their distinct Indigenous knowledge. In Guatemala, this implies the need to go beyond the piecemeal work the Ministry of Education is currently doing by adding pieces of Indigenous Maya knowledge to its curriculum. In essence, these contradictions can be negotiated by conducting research from a researcher’s
own culturally grounded methodologies, as informed by that particular group’s distinct Indigenous philosophies and theories.

Following L. T. Smith (1999, 2008), I argue that it is time academia recognizes the validity of applying culturally grounded theories and methodologies to Indigenous research as a way to reflect and analyze Indigenous realities from concepts based on Indigenous languages and cultures. Secondly, and derived from the aforementioned Eurocentric understandings of Indigenous peoples and knowledge, Indigenous people have largely been exclusively represented as victims: exploited agrarian workers, poor citizens, and illiterate aid recipients. It is time to also present stories of hope to make power (A. Smith, 2008). For example, Indigenous labor played a key role in expanding the economy of the newly created nation-state. Relegating Indigenous peoples to rural areas supported the rigid definition of Indigenous identity and ignored the increasing migration of Indigenous peoples to urban contexts due to colonial, and later, multinational encroachment. Notwithstanding, the participants described how their distinct understandings of spirituality helped them survive. Their stories illustrate that the diverse populations of Indigenous peoples today are deeply connected to Creator—even if they have adopted a Eurocentric religion or live in a Westernized context. Moreover, their accounts also exemplify the survival of Maya Indigenous Knowledge (MIK) through these changes. It is therefore important to include the spiritual elements of MIK in the education system. The diversity of understandings and definitions of what it means to be Maya, the elements found in MIK and how these are lived today require that Indigenous researchers make sense of research and the academic world using Maya concepts. This is an example of how Indigenous peoples could take power back through the creation of new destinies for present and future generations.

The possibilities of working from Indigenous understandings of education are limited by the construction of education within a Western framework. For example, MIK is currently the basis for several proposals for educational reform. The proposals put forth by Maya organizations, communities, and experts advocate for Maya Indigenous Education (MIE) exemplify how to strengthen a cultural group’s identity in order to negotiate and actively participate in the determination of its future. In this sense, MIE centers an Indigenous epistemological position that remembers, reclaims, promotes, and guides future generations based on our connections with Creator—all of which are elements of Indigenous traditional
education (Hampton, 1995). However, these guidelines are, at best, mere addendums to current educational structures. Therefore, although aspects of MIK currently make up the contents of the intercultural and bilingual education (EBI, in Spanish) curriculum, MIE goes beyond these additions to the foundational Western elements currently present in the education system in Guatemala. In this manner, my research reveals the kind of discussions that need to take place regarding the place of Indigenous education: inside or outside of institutionalized spaces.

At a philosophical level, MIK also recognizes the importance of women’s participation—not only men’s—in all aspects of the culture. Historical documents such as the Codices, the Maya creation story, and ceremonial and sacred objects reveal the gendered nature of Maya Indigenous knowledge, whereby Grandmother’s Knowledge (GK) shares importance with Grandfather’s Knowledge. Further, as L. T. Smith (1999) states, “Western concepts of race intersect in complex ways with concepts of gender” (p. 45). Indigenous women and men today live in a Westernized world, filled with labels and concepts that are not Indigenous. In this context, I conceive throughout this dissertation that Indigenous education is but one area where Indigenous Maya peoples can exercise their right to self-determination and, as such, the elements that are included in this education are not merely elements to memorize and recite: they are teachings that will guide future generations to walk in a good way and overcome difficulties. How women and men understand and engage with the tensions between the philosophies and praxis of Maya Indigenous Knowledge is the focus of this dissertation.

The argument made is developed in two interlinked parts. First, I illustrate that Maya peoples in general understand and live their ancestral knowledge in different ways. Some participants have had to struggle to relearn and put into practice their ancestral knowledge. Others have never questioned their identity or the role of tradition in their lives. Tradition, in this sense, is nuanced to assess whether the values inherent in the culture (balance, reciprocity, truth, responsibility, cooperation, and honesty) remain (Alvarado & Coz, 2003; Cabrera 1992; Camey Huz, et al, 2006). This reflection leads to the discussion of present-day women’s exclusion and the violence against them, and the usefulness of engaging with the women’s and feminist movements in Guatemala. It goes alongside Indigenous feminist discussions of colonial oppression as a reminder that Indigenous women’s subjugation cannot be entirely reduced to
patriarchy. Therefore, Indigenous women also demand an examination of the impact of colonialism on both Indigenous women and men.

My argument to reclaim and put into practice Maya Indigenous Knowledge illustrates the tensions and possibilities as Indigenous academics and communities all work towards building a world without injustice. It illustrates that, in areas where imbalance or injustice prevails, such as gender exclusion and violence, Indigenous women have carefully and decidedly chosen to participate with the women’s or feminist movement so their voices are heard. This participation, by no means accepted by leaders or the Maya movement in general – albeit with little support -, also exemplifies how colonization is alive. Racism, discrimination, and exclusions based on notions of non-Indigenous superiority prevail, uniting Indigenous women and men in spite of the contradictions and tensions arising from women’s political and active participation in the lives and decisions of communities. However, the participants illustrate an awareness of these tensions and a commitment to continue to work to address them. Education becomes the site where everyone is welcome to participate, reflect upon, and discuss areas in which the state continues to fail all peoples. It also becomes the site to make changes in the areas where, as human beings concerned with positive change, we can all create change for our communities and ourselves.

**Research Objectives and Study Design**

In honoring my ancestors, I attempt to apply the relational structure and philosophy inherent in the Ceiba to the organization and presentation of the voices that produce the knowledge in this dissertation. The Ceiba is also a teaching tool through which Maya peoples transmit lessons, knowledge, and values to new generations. The lessons in this dissertation are based on the stories of, and co-construction of knowledge with seventeen self-identified Maya professional women and men who have participated directly or indirectly in education reform. These are professionals, with or without Western accreditation, who at present live and work in Guatemala City. Some still hold very close ties to their home communities. Others have made the city their community. The Ceiba also informs the foundations of the methodology and structure of this dissertation. The dissertation is divided into eight chapters, each corresponding to a particular part of the Ceiba: its roots, trunk, branches, leaves, fruits, and seeds.
This study examines the ways in which Indigenous Maya Knowledge shapes Maya Indigenous Education proposals for education reform. It also explores how MIE impacts on three areas of social organization:

1. Knowledge Production and Gender;
2. The Maya Tzolk’in Calendar in Education; and
3. Nation and Citizenship Building.

**Proposed Contributions**

Thematically, this dissertation contributes to the growing scholarship on global Indigenous and Native studies. It also contributes to the theoretical work on Indigenous discursive frameworks (Dei, 2011), the Indigenous humanities (Battiste, 2004; Battiste, Bell, I. M. Findlay, L. Findlay & Youngblood Henderson, 2005), Native and Indigenous feminisms (Archuleta, 2006; Cunningham, 2006; Deerchild, 2003; Denetdale, 2006, 2008; Mihesuah, 1998; Ouellette, 2002; A. Smith, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2009), Indigenous and tribal research (Kovach, 2009; L. T. Smith, 1999, 2005; Weber-Pillwax, 1999; Wilson, 2003, 2008). In particular it contributes Maya perspectives to Indigenous and tribal education and research, particularly useful in Latin American studies where these perspectives have limited representation. I hope that through presenting another approach to education, research and knowledge production, I illustrate the richness, complexity, and hope inherent in the realities that these Maya professionals negotiate daily in their lives. It is also a beginning point for discussion on how to build bridges with other types of education that promote human rights, gender equality, and social justice, without having to ascribe to their particular languages, conceptual frameworks, or affiliations to the nation-state. One can be hopeful that understanding the similarities and respecting the differences between different knowledge systems can foster an engagement wherein Indigenous peoples’ distinctiveness is maintained and valued on its own merit.

**Summary of Dissertation Objectives**

As already stated, my research is intended to shed light on the need to implement Maya Indigenous Education (MIE) in order to correct misconceptions about Indigenous knowledge and
contemporary Maya peoples. It also contributes to the growing literature about the concepts upon which MIE is based, in particular its epistemological concepts. It is clear that language is also an important basis for MIE but, given my own limited knowledge of the Maya languages, it is an aspect not dealt with in this dissertation (that will be a subject for future research). Therefore, I primarily focus on education reform in order to correct misconceptions and moreover, legitimize the Indigenous knowledge as valid academic theories and philosophies in educational and sociological research.

This research is also intended to be a contribution to the debates regarding the content of Indigenous education, who has the right to create it, and from what epistemological and language conceptualizations it ought to be created. Further, in keeping with the unifying thread of identity construction, I want to highlight Victor Montejo’s words that “[the] Maya must realize that not all ladinos belong to the elite and that they cannot be treated as outsiders either, since they share Maya blood” (Montejo, 2005, p. 72). The statement implies that an analysis of the potential of Maya education holds to critically engage all nations that live together in Guatemala across difference is necessary. Throughout this dissertation, the goal is to explain MIE as a way of life, one that does not exclude and does not seek to alienate, but, rather, one that can bring Nations together with respect for the differences between them. In other words, showing how education can strengthen one’s history, culture, language, and sense of self, shows that other cultures can also benefit. To engage with others through respectful relationships is but one step in the process of strengthening each person’s identity in relation to their community.

Participants in my interviews shared in many instances and conversations how, in spite of its many shortcomings, the past reforms constitute important advances in their own right. However, there was general agreement about the need to continue working towards challenging the myth that only Western systems of knowledge production and dissemination ought to inform the current education system. The proposal to implement a new national curriculum in different Indigenous languages and contexts is one of the newer ideas. However, it still falls short of the goal of epistemic self-determination (L. T. Smith, 2005) because it fails to deconstruct current mainstream Western constructs of education. These dominant constructs are based on individualism and the fragmentation of rights and freedoms. This style of education is a symptom of a society that does not value Indigenous knowledge or oral traditions. Therefore, this
dissertation continues the struggle to validate stories as a form of knowledge and as a form of meaning making (Kovack, 2009). In this regard, it contributes to the growing literature on different ways of conceptualizing and conducting research from Indigenous epistemological standpoints.

As part of a decolonizing approach to determining the concepts with which to analyze social phenomena, I bring attention to the messy terrain of remembering and reclaiming the importance of listening to the voices of the Grandmothers alongside those of our Grandfathers. The term Grandmothers refers to women Elders as well as to those ancestors who have walked before us. The same holds true for Grandfathers. Following Elizabeth Archuleta (2006), a self-proclaimed Indigenous feminist who draws from Lee Maracle’s Grandmother image in I Am Woman, I posit that for Maya Indigenous Education, Grandmothers’ perspectives also represent a collective of voices that map out resistance. I also seek to illustrate how Indigenous Maya women today represent, “a composite of the reality of our history and present existence” (Maracle, as cited in Archuleta, 2006. p. 95). It is also part of the thread that guides this work: becoming whole or Jun Winaq’. Thus, this research brings to light some perceptions, as shared by professional Indigenous women and men, of participation in the process of building the MPER, what knowledges are included, how they are applied, the congruency these have with Elders’ and sacred books’ teachings about women’s traditional roles, and how these roles have been subverted through colonization and patriarchy (Cunningham, 2006; Deerchild, 2003; Denetdale, 2006, 2008; Ouellette, 2002; A. Smith, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2011). Finally, the Jun Winaq’ becomes a unit of analysis with which to gauge whether balance (equality and justice) has been attained. Conversely, it also becomes the process itself for understanding our own healing and, thus, providing younger generations with a positive role model from which they can learn. I now turn to a brief overview of some salient historical events and developments that together shaped the highly unequal and racist relationship between Guatemala as a nation-state (including its dominant classes) and Indigenous peoples.
Chapter 2
Contextualizing Indigenous Demands for Education:
An Historical Overview

Introduction

In this chapter, I illustrate how Indigenous peoples in the Mayab’ (Maya territory) have resisted the imposition of colonizing forces since the conquistador Pedro de Alvarado arrived in 1523. Maya documents, such as the various Codices, make available evidence that recent efforts to critically maintain Maya culture in the context of globalizing, assimilating, neocolonial forces are nothing new. Further, a review of salient historical moments from 1523 until the signing of the Peace Accords in 1996 demonstrates that the state has sought to regulate Indigenous identity to strengthen and perpetuate the colonial enterprise (institutions and narratives) (Cannon, 2011a). Legislation that encouraged miscegenation and the imposition of labels such as mestizos or mixed-bloods during the liberal period (1871) upon some communities furthered this colonial enterprise. Education also became a handmaid to the process of erasing Indigenous identity through the creation and maintenance of static definitions of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. Based on this context, this chapter situates Maya peoples’ educational demands historically through a review of significant events that have affected the social imaginary of

Figure 2. National Congress on Maya Education 2007. Photo by author.
Guatemalan society. I argue that the portrayal of the existence of Indigenous peoples as “the Indian problem” has prevented the construction a homogeneous liberal nation.

In the first part, I outline the main events that occurred during the colonial period from contact in 1524 until independence from Spain in 1823. I show that state independence, as a construction of the specific location and goals of the non-Indigenous elite, did not translate into freedom for Indigenous peoples. Specifically, I focus on the impact of the country’s political organization and its notion of homogeneity as a tool of unity on Indigenous peoples. Second, an explanation of the liberal period (1871) sets the stage for the implementation of liberal education policies that did not change the racist and exclusionary attitude of the state to Indigenous populations. The third part provides an overview of the revolutionary (1944) and counterrevolutionary (1954) periods that appeared to bring the country to a more equal and “democratic” period, though largely to the benefit of the dominant racial and cultural classes. Finally, the chapter focuses on the 1970s through to the 1990s, when a select group of Maya intellectuals and community leaders developed what is known as the Maya Movement. This section emphasizes the formation, political goals, and actions of the Movement along with their influence on the signing of the Peace Accords and the current efforts to construct and decide their future. This describes the context of the current demands in education. This chapter weaves the stories of the participants throughout, to demonstrate how state policies to annihilate Indigenous peoples continue to operate in subtle and seductive ways while the Maya continue to survive.

The reasoning behind including this historical chapter is to elucidate the general context and situation of Maya peoples in Guatemala since contact with the colonizers. It also seeks to share some of the experiences of abuse, trauma, and genocide experienced by them. I hope to nuance the claims to fixed notions of identity and culture accepted by most people yet contested by others. Rather than presenting a mere retelling of what we, as Indigenous peoples from different cultures and experiences, have endured, I wanted to make the account empowering. Empowerment comes from honoring the stories of present-day Indigenous Maya peoples and their struggles with the remnants of colonization and its continuing effects on education, including my own. Thus, this section provides hope by illustrating where the course of history has the potential to change. This transformation can improve the lives and conditions of
Indigenous peoples through the reclaiming and upholding of their Indigenous identity and values. In the next section I discuss the basis for Maya identity and education.

**Decolonizing History and Education**

The struggle to validate Indigenous knowledge in the academy has come a long way. Scholars have raised the need to discuss the existence and validity of other systems of knowledge and have paved the way for the creation of Indigenous and decolonizing theoretical perspectives (Agrawal, 1995; Battiste, 1986, 1998, 2000a, 2000c; Dei, 2000, 2008, 2011; Graveline, 1998; Lawrence & Dua, 2011; Marker, 2004; Montejo, 2005; L. T. Smith, 1999). On their shoulders, I can choose an Indigenous decolonizing framework that centers the knowledge, logic, understandings and, most important, the spirituality that has helped the Maya not only create knowledge but also maintain and reproduce it.

My story is unlike that of Maya peoples who grew up in a community where Maya language, connection to the land, traditional dress, and social organization bound them together. I grew up in a time after my grandmother had left her community, had literally traded her traditional clothes for Western dress, chosen to speak in Spanish and to forget about the rural area where she grew up. Her choices speak to a context and time when the inequities and injustice experienced by peoples who chose to maintain external markers of Indigenous identity made them rational. My grandmother, like many other people, chose to provide what she understood to be a better life for her family, in the sense that pretending to belong to the mestizo group provided certain freedoms from social exclusion and racism. Thus, I grew up in Guatemala City and attended a private Catholic school that my parents could barely afford despite their full time jobs. My education served as a tool to promote the myth of a homogeneous nation, ignoring the complex histories that placed us at a crossroads between modernity and supposed backwardness. I was taught to believe that reading was more important than oral stories, and that the written word had more truth and objectivity than the spoken word. Oral accounts have been discounted in history, education, and legal settings as “hearsay,” as unreliable, particularly in the context of trying to prove or disprove the superiority of one knowledge system over another. I therefore grew up trying to learn “real” history from “verifiable” and “objective” sources. I
learned the Eurocentric ideas of modernity that permeated Guatemala and the rest of the Central American countries that gained their independence from Spain in 1821.

Given that education has a direct relationship to knowledge production and the maintenance of the status quo, it is not surprising that I was encouraged to learn from colonial perspectives about the history of a nation that had severed ties with the Spanish colonizers. However, we were never allowed to ask whether this system duplicated the other system and what the goals of this new independent nation of Guatemala were. Further, in terms of writing history from Indigenous perspectives, I concur with Lawrence and Dua’s (2011) eloquent statement that, “A crucial part of the silencing of Indigenous voices is the demand that Indigenous scholars attempting to write about their histories conform to academic discourses that have already staked a claim to expertise about our pasts—notably anthropology and history” (p. 68). It is for this reason that I present an analysis of history that provides more nuanced accounts of events that affected Indigenous lives within and outside of educational contexts. But, before I delve into this history, I want to briefly present how the Maya perceive our identity.

Maya understandings of the culture come from an acceptance of Maya culture as fluid yet still grounded in the epistemological and axiological foundations expressed in the Maya Creation Story in the *Pop Vuh*\(^4\), as well as an understanding of the values inherent in the culture are expressed in the metaphor of the Ceiba. This identity is passed down generationally through stories. It is embedded in language and a direct relationship to the land and a person’s community of origin. However, as the participants narrate, the story is not clean and linear because of the countless displacements of Maya communities since Spanish encroachment. Further, it is important to consider the effects of the miscegenation between Spanish and Indigenous peoples. These events have created different experiences of Maya identity. From conquest to the present, many social, environmental, and political forces have caused displacement and forced removal from traditional territories. Through these events, a caste

\(^4\) Throughout the dissertation, *Pop Vuh* refers to the document written by Adrián Inés Chávez (1981) which literally means “The Book of Time” in Maya Kich’e’ and *Popol Vuh* to that transcribed by Adrián Recinos (1987), and the most recent version by Sam Colop (2008) translated as “The Book of Council”. I do not discuss the debates over which version is preferable, and use the terms interchangeably to denote our Maya creation story.
system was created to justify the power yielded by Spanish and mixed race peoples in the so-called New World.

Miscegenation is termed *mestizaje* in Guatemala. Its main function became the homogenization of the newly-founded nation which was used to exert political and economic control over the Indigenous populations that were thought of as barriers to modernity. In an attempt to re-right history (L. T. Smith, 1999), the deeply personal stories of the participants regarding their engagement with education demonstrate that their resilience is rooted in Indigenous ancestral knowledge. The stories also demonstrate how to safeguard that knowledge through the understanding that every right comes with a responsibility for which a person is accountable to the culture and identity he or she claims to hold. In what follows I discuss how our Grandmothers and Grandfathers resisted invasion.

**History since 1524:**

**Contact and invasion of the Spanish meets the resistance of the Maya**

Tecún Uman appears in history books as the K’iche’ prince who died fighting against the Spanish invasion in 1524. In contrast, María Guarchaj, a female K’iche’ leader in Quetzaltenango who led a movement against the Spanish Crown, is not mentioned in the history books. She incited women to refuse paying tribute to the Spanish Crown in the form of woven cotton. She died for her actions and, although she is a heroine, her story does not appear anywhere in the history books. However, she is remembered in oral tradition (Personal communication, María Morales, 2007).

All children in Guatemala learn about Tecún Uman in third grade history class. I remember that I had to draw the final fight, interpreting what the textbook had taught me: blood covering the emerald green quetzal feathers of his grandiose headdress, and the conquistador Pedro de Alvarado raising his sword in colonial triumph. The message children learn is that Maya Indigenous peoples lost the battle, which made it right for the “strong” Spanish to impose their rules. This is an example of the portrayal of the Maya in history, instilling in children the Eurocentric idea that the invasion and conquest lead to positive gains for the *uncivilized conquered* (Carrillo Padilla, 2004). A further issue is also implicated in these colonial tellings:
not only are our male leaders undermined and misrepresented, but the women leaders are left out of documented history altogether, furthering the notion that women are passive and have not contributed to society. This notion justifies and is carried on in current social and political contexts in which women are token participants, invited only because they help garner funding for projects:

Actualmente vemos que en muchos proyectos que se realizan en las comunidades solamente se utiliza la palabra participación para ver si hay participación de la mujer pero solamente para que se realicen los proyectos. En la realidad, hay muchos proyectos en donde los líderes son nada más hombres y solamente hay hombres en sus organizaciones porque han dejado a sus mujeres encerradas. Por más que les digan que allí tienen todo, el dinero, etc. el punto es que ellas no salgan, que estén en la casa. Somos muy pocas las que hemos roto esta barrera y que estamos participando pero siempre nos preguntan que por qué salimos, si el hombre cumple con sus responsabilidades de ser hombre.

Today, we see that many of the projects carried out in the communities use the word participation to see if women will participate, but only as a way to get the projects [funded]. But the reality is that there are many projects where only the men are leaders and the organizations are made up of only men because they have left the women confined to their homes. And although you can tell them that the money is there for the women to participate, they just don’t allow it because the point is for the women to never go out; to stay at home. Only a few of us have overcome this barrier and are now participating, but [people] always ask why we leave our houses; and they ask if the men are fulfilling their obligations at home.

(Ana Ventura, June 19, 2007)

The division of labor and the value assigned to each gendered activity today reflect the economic models brought over by Spanish settlers. In other words, the economic forces of the powerful criollo, who are the descendants of Spanish-born people born in Guatemala, and the ladino elite dictated the social relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Guatemala and between Indigenous women and men. These factors also determined the development of social and political ideological positions that eroded traditional Maya forms of social organization in which women actively participated in all matters of community. This erosion occurred through the Spanish Crown’s allotment of land and labor to encomenderos, or agents in trust responsible for overseeing the production of goods for the King and Queen of
Spain and for Christianizing Indigenous peoples in return for their labor.\(^5\) By the time of independence the new social order was well established, particularly during the liberal regime, which I describe in the next section.

**Education postindependence (1821)**

Guatemala and the rest of the Central American countries gained independence from Spain in 1821. Five of the Central American countries’ elite representatives agreed to form part of the new “Mexican empire of General Emperor Agustín Iturbide … [and when it collapsed] the Central American leaders declared their independence from Mexico and pronounced themselves citizens of an independent United Provinces of Central America in July 1823”\(^6\) (Stirton Weaver, 1999, p. 21).

The construction of the modern nation state in Guatemala was based on similar characteristics to those found in North American settler societies: The ideological foundation was that a society can only go forward by leaving its past behind, and in the case of the independent state, by creating a new or cosmic race (Vasconcelos & Jaën, 1997). Some authors have argued that this modernization event meant the creation of an imaginary, unified community based on the common experience of having gained independence from the Spanish Crown (Rickemberg, 1987), first as a colony of Mexico, then as part of a Central American Confederacy, and later as an independent nation.

During the first years of the liberal government, the goal to absorb “difference” in order to create and conceptualize a homogenous, non-Indigenous nation prompted institutionalized efforts to get rid of Indigenous peoples. First, this annihilation began as physical extermination, either through direct massacres or through the exploitation of Indigenous Maya peoples. Their exploited labor provided the physical infrastructure necessary for the modernization project to go forward. Second, it occurred at the religious level, based on the Catholic Church’s intent to

\(^5\) For further discussion see Wolfe (1982), particularly Part II, “Iberians in America” (pp. 127–158).

protect Indigenous peoples from themselves (and their non-Christian ways), to further colonization through Christianization. Most recently, the Christianization has worked to assimilate Indigenous peoples into the national culture. The colonial period, similar to the postindependence period, saw the integration of Indigenous peoples through their participation as labor or as “products” to be used and sold (Rickemberg, 1987). The folklorization and token use of Indigenous symbolism and heritage is still evident today. Many of the interviewees stated that their experiences with the state oftentimes involved “representing the voice” of all Indigenous peoples, and that they were included not because of their potential to contribute but rather to fulfill a quota to maintain the image of the state.

During the transitional period from independence to the liberal regime (1821–1831), the creation of a modern nation-state took as its basis the Spanish model of governance, language, and territorial divisions. Historical documents describe how the new independent nation benefited the dominant non-Indigenous population (criollos) and those who had adapted well to the Spanish language and culture (ladinos), and mixed-bloods or mestizos. This racial hierarchy has been documented (Casaús Arzú, 1992) and can be diagrammed as follows:

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7 Some authors suggest ladino is a term used to denote the mixed-blood people born in Guatemala who learned the Spanish language and customs (Rickemberg, 1987; Taracena Arriola, 2002). The most common use, however, is to describe people who identify with the Spanish (Cojtí, 2005; Heckt, 2004). At present, there is a debate regarding the semiotics of the word, arguing for the use of non-Indigenous, since ladino carries with it the negative connotation of people who are thieves and have no scruples.
Figure 3. Hierarchical/colonial positioning of races in Guatemala.

Liberal president Maríano Gálvez (1831–1838) created laws to reform and secularize the Guatemalan nation-state while maintaining the position that Indigenous peoples present an obstacle to attaining the ideal of a monolithic nation. This created a paradox because the modernization of the state required Indigenous labor, and ensuring the availability of this labor required keeping Indigenous peoples in a state of subordination, in part by excluding them from education. In other words, the maintenance of a separate and subordinate group, an obstacle to the creation of a unified modern nation-state was required for the development of that state \(^8\) (C. Smith, 1990, pp. 76–79; Taracena Arriola, 2002, pp. 220–225, as cited in Heckt, 2004, p. 39).

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\(^8\) Many laws were passed to reduce the land base of Indigenous peoples. For example, on November 30, 1830 the government decided to sell plots of land considered *terra nullius*. Further, the government created the September 20, 1933, bylaw requiring all landowners to register their land titles in the Land Registry Book. To the detriment of Indigenous peoples, this required knowledge of the bylaw as well as the ability to read and write in Spanish.
On the other, in the interests of the creation of a monolithic nation-state, if Indigenous peoples were deemed worthy of being educated it would be for the purpose of assimilating them into the national discourse of a homogeneous, non-Indigenous nation. This type of education is characterized by Hampton (1995) as “schooling for assimilation” (p. 9) whereby the non-Indigenous elite impose and execute their models, with their methods, to further their interests. In short, Indigenous peoples represented both a commodity to exploit in the building of modernity and an obstacle to becoming modern in the European imaginary.

As mentioned above, the connection between schooling and land disposition cannot be ignored. Education at first excluded the majority of Indigenous peoples further establishing their role as laborers exclusively. Gálvez achieved this division between Indigenous laborers and the *criollo* elite landowners by creating laws that took away communal land titles. This systemic theft led to land privatization as an incentive to increase the influx of non-Indigenous settlers. The increased immigrant numbers let to a situation similar to the marginalization of Indigenous groups to the reservations in Canada and other English settler societies. In Guatemala, this occurred by pushing them onto to harsher lands. As a result, the physical separation and containment of Indigenous peoples in designated and limited spaces forced their relocation and freed land up for encroachment by the settlers, ensuring the exploitation of their labor and their evangelization (Garbers, 1993, as cited in Heckt, 2004, p. 37). The segregation of entire families from their communities occurs even today in the form of agricultural migration: day laborers work for wealthy landowners. They stay in a compound that not only ensures their production and efficiency, but also creates economic and social dependency on the landowners. Edgar Choguaj shared how his family and community broke this cycle of dependency:

Nací en una finca cafetalera; soy hijo de un campesino explotado como la mayoría de este país. Viví los primeros años en la explotación y declaramos la independencia hace 29 años y nos fuimos de ese lugar.

I was born on a coffee plantation. I am the son of an exploited farmer, like the majority [of farmers] in this country. I lived the first years of my life under conditions of exploitation until we declared independence [from the plantation] 29 years ago and we left that place. (Edgar Choguaj, June 6, 2007)
This particular practice of large-scale farming allowed the rental or acquisition of communal land by large landowners focused on growing commercial crops (Williams, 1994, p. 56). In this context, it also became imperative to hire Indigenous peoples to work the lands, often with little compensation, but sometimes with access to some schooling. Another participant shared his story about growing up in a plantation that provided schooling in Spanish only:

En principio empezamos en la finca, tenía una escuelita hasta tercero priMaría, solo era para aprender a leer y escribir después a cortar café o caña … las escuelas estaban en las fincas, las fincas estaban … por allí, al sur. Mis papas solo vivían en San Lucas ellos son originarios de Patzún, se iban hasta allá, y después para no dar tanta vuelta nos quedamos a vivir en San Lucas.

At first, we lived on a plantation. It had a school up to third grade; it was only to learn to read and write [in Spanish] after we were finished cutting cane or coffee … the schools were on the plantations, the plantations were … over there, to the south [of the city]. My parents lived in San Lucas [Tolimán, Sololá] even though they are from Patzún and so they would travel all that way and eventually, in order to avoid the long trips back home [Patzún], we stayed here in San Lucas [Tolimán]. (Romulo Cuj, August 30, 2007)

The trend toward teaching in Spanish, or castellanización, became a government strategy to assimilate Indigenous peoples into the national imaginary, particularly during the Indigenista period of the October Revolution, 1944–1954. It did not seek to provide Indigenous peoples with adequate tools with which to overcome the racist, segregationist, and exclusionary trends that relegated Indigenous peoples to the margins. It also did not serve to improve their economic or political status in the sense of relinquishing control of their destinies to Indigenous communities. This experience, however, prompted academics such as Rodrigo Chub Ical to work towards literacy in Maya languages rather than Spanish:

Yo soy lingüista … con la visión de querer no castellanizar pero de querer dar una educación adecuada para las comunidades y para los niños, pero también involucrar a la comunidad. Ese divorcio posiblemente exista hasta ahora entre la escuela y la comunidad, pero cuando hay, y es de la misma cultura y es de la misma comunidad, entonces se hace esa vinculación: la participación de padres y madres de familia, la atención adecuada a las niñas y a los niños en el idioma.
I am a linguist … and my vision is not to teach Spanish, but rather to provide children with an adequate education in which the community is also involved. There is currently a separation between school and community, but when there is community involvement, and especially when the community is their own culture, then we can conclude the following: that parent involvement equals adequate care and attention to the children in their own languages. (Rodrigo Chub Ical, October 31, 2007)

This quote suggests that an effective Indigenous education requires community involvement. It describes a collective element in teaching and learning through observation and example. Likewise, Eber Hampton (1995) describes five different meanings of Indian education. One of them is traditional Indian education, portrayed as taking place, “within cultural settings that were characterized by subsistence economies, in-context learning, personal and kinship relations between teachers and students, and ample opportunities for students to observe adult role models who exemplified the knowledge, skill, and values being taught” (Hampton, 1995, p. 8). Traditional or Maya community education follows this schema. Its emphasis on a collective responsibility to teach Maya values and languages did not fit with the top-down approach instituted by government. As I will show in the next section, the colonial stage, particularly after independence in 1821, did not improve the situation of Indigenous peoples. The government sought to regulate education to reflect the desires of only the non-Indigenous minority. This period brought about changes that continue to affect Indigenous Maya peoples today.

It is important to note, however, that oral history tells us many places were not colonized easily, such as the Ixil region of Quiché (Palacios Aragón, 2005). Regarding these acts of resistance to colonial encroachment, Wuqub’ Iq’ also tells us that these far away territories are the ones that the Ministry of Education has overlooked and where they are most likely send Indigenous teachers in order to remove them from the mainstream of the system. However, in the context of present-day education, it proved a positive experience for Wuqub’Iq’ because he was able to tap into the stories written in the Pop Vuh and see where the stories had taken place:

Aquí me mandan a trabajar a la Zona Reina y trabajé lo que es el Plan 22: trabajaba 22 días y tenía 8 de descanso. Toda la gente buscaba la ciudad. Hubo una época en la vida de Guatemala en donde todo mundo buscaba la ciudad, pero yo era lo contrario: me iba para el campo. Esta situación yo digo hoy que si fue debido a los Abuelos, entonces les agradezco mucho por habermelo dado esa
oportunidad. En aquella época, yo no lo vi como una oportunidad sino que lo vi como un castigo. Pero ahora me doy cuenta que fue una oportunidad; ahora con lo que veo, pienso y siento, y con lo que aprendí, lo que hice. Fue una oportunidad. Entonces cuando me fui, el primer documento que me llevé fue el Popol Vuh. Lo leí cuantas veces quise y me gustó tanto la narración, que aunque no tenía este concepto de cosmovisión, sencillamente me parecía como un cuento. Pero yo decía “Aquí estoy en la Sierra de los Cuchumatanes. Desde aquí se mira el Río Chixoy. Allí corre el río. Entonces allí estuvieron todos los personajes.” Me subía y me imaginaba a todos los personajes en el río. Leí el libro varias veces. Intenté también entender el Chilam Balam pero me dio algunas ideas.

So as a new teacher, they [Ministry of Education staff] sent me to work in the Zona Reina [remote area in Northern Quiché] and I worked a schedule called Plan 22: I worked for 22 days straight and rested for 8. [This was during a time when] all teachers wanted to work in the city. There was a time when everyone wanted to work in the city, but me, I sought the refuge of the countryside. I believe today that this experience happened because our ancestors gave me this opportunity. Although back then, I did not see that. I saw it as punishment. But today I understand it was an opportunity for me to learn, live, think, and feel different experiences that taught me much. So, when I left, the first document I took with me was the Popol Vuh. I read it many, many times and I liked it so much that even though I did not understand it from the point of our cosmovision, I saw it as a mythical story. But I used to tell myself: “Here I am in the Cuchumatanes Highlands. From here I can see the Chixoy River. That is where the river flows. And that is where all of these characters lived.” And so I would climb the mountain and would imagine all of the characters of the story in that river. I read it again and again. And I also read the Chilam Balam, which gave me more ideas. (Wuqub’ Iq’, May 24, 2007)

The story reflects the learning process this participant went through because he had the opportunity to live in a remote area that contained the knowledge that he was able to extract from the Pop Vuh and from the spirit of the land. It is apparent that this opportunity to connect on a physical and spiritual level to the land provided healing of the wounds made by the messages learned during childhood that Indigenous peoples are unable to provide valid and pertinent knowledge for education. It also illustrates an Indigenous pedagogy of place for teaching and learning. On this subject, Dei (2000) and Dei, Hall, and Rosenberg (2000) remind us about the healing power of pedagogies that strive to connect the powerful and transformative capacities of
traditional theory and practice with contemporary issues. The participant suggests that his experience of connecting to the land provided a means to ground his knowledge while strengthening his sense of the history of a particular place, thereby forging a stronger sense identity.

Referring back to Hampton’s (1995) “Traditional Indian Education,” it is now possible to draw some generalizations about Indigenous teaching and learning. Indigenous pedagogy has, since time immemorial, used observations, development, and perfection of science, mainly astronomy, agriculture, architecture, weaving, writing, and the arts. Thus, Indigenous education survived at home and in communities, even after the Western values imposed through colonization had seeped into the social fabric. There are stories of those who resisted and persevered in the maintenance of their Indigenous knowledge and wisdom. Participants echoed in their experiences how some families they know sacrificed their roles in their community in order to protect their children and provide them with what they perceived to be a better future:

El anzuelo de becas que lanzaron varios catequistas [Católicos] de ese tiempo era para lograr gente firme, convertir almas para la iglesia católica fue el objetivo de las becas. Mi padre y muchos de su generación, de esta forma ingresaron a la iglesia, balanceando entre la ventaja y desventaja que influiría en las familias Mayas y por ende en la comunidad, que es la otra cara del etnocidio. Esta forma le obligo a abandonar su ser Ajq’ij, a cambio de que nosotros estudiáramos. Tuvimos la oportunidad cuatro hijos: tres mujeres, un varón, y un nieto.

Many [Catholic] priests offered scholarships in order to ensure they would get enough people converted to Catholicism. My father and many others from his generation joined the Church in this manner, albeit always weighing their decision on the advantages and disadvantages this would bring not only to their families but to the entire Maya community. This is the other face of ethnocide. And this is how he was forced to leave his path as Ajq’ij [Maya spiritual guide and timekeeper] so we [his children] could go to school. And so this is how the four of us, three sons and one daughter, plus his grandson, were able to attend school.

(Virginia Ajxup, July 1, 2007)

Providing an education became important to many Maya families who did not want their children to suffer the perils that arise from exclusion from the dominant society. Virginia’s account of her father giving up his spirituality in order to provide all his children with an
education reflects his sense of responsibility. That she attended school along with her brothers also illustrates that Maya values include woman at the center of Indigenous Maya society. Her father’s understanding that education improves one’s social condition illustrates the grounds of the tough choices parents make every day when they send their children to school. Not having an education system that allows all children to retain their cultural identity is a reality. In fact, offering the scholarships in order to convert people to Catholicism exemplifies the many situations where help comes at a high price. The consequences of the sacrifices Maya parents made in order for their children to attend school are still relevant today:

Esa fue la otra forma de la integración del indio. La iglesia uso la estrategia de lo apostólico, romano y el Dios que cada quien define y le gusta, para lograr más catequistas y con esto la imposición de la ideología y consagrar la muerte de los conocimientos y sabiduría de un pueblo. Porque esto implicaba, abandonar lo suyo para integrarse a lo otro que nunca entendieron porque es la condena, el miedo, la acumulación y la sacralización de la esclavitud. Una ideología que habla de amor pero que nunca vive lo que predica … La iglesia se dedico a sumar catequistas y el exterminar la identidad de un pueblo.

This was the other form of integrating the Indian [sic]. The church relied on providing a version of the apostolic and Roman God that would attract more converts in order to get more people to spread the imposition of the [Catholic] ideology to kill the knowledge and wisdom of our people. Because this implied that we had to abandon what was ours in order to form part of something that we never fully understood; because this meant accepting this fear and condoning slavery. This ideology speaks of love and yet it never practices what it preaches. … The Church focused on training more converts and exterminating the identity of a people. (Virginia Ajxup, July 1, 2007)

Maya culture, as stated in the *Pop Vuh*, emphasizes the importance of putting ancestral teachings into practice, particularly the value of one’s word, because of its connection to breath, and the power of breath to connect all in the universe. Virginia’s quote above provides a contrasting element to the values of Maya culture. In her example, she states how the Church preaches love and kindness, but only on the condition that Indigenous peoples convert to Catholicism. Although I do not intend to create dichotomies and romanticize Maya culture, it is important to note that Maya philosophy places equal value on all living beings including the
seemingly nonliving, such as rocks. Catholicism, instead, views this attitude as a form of paganism, a vision that justified violent actions against Indigenous communities. This may seem at first to romanticize Maya Indigenous culture because it doesn’t take into account the gendered social relations brought on by colonial relations with the Spanish invaders. Colonial relations are at the core of what education needs to teach present and future generations to provide hope for the transformational possibilities of learning about other ways of existing and relating in society. Education has represented Indigenous identity through Western and colonial perspectives on history. These ideologies are implicated in the differences in treatment of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in society. The next section explains the legal frameworks that have helped to advance education in Guatemala and the processes used to create a multicultural, pluralistic nation as reflected in its education system.

The Maya Movement

The Maya Movement represents a political juncture resulting from years of organizing around land claim issues and the exploitation of Indigenous peoples. It is based on the right to difference and on the plurality of cultures and languages in Guatemala. Cultural theorists and anthropologists such as Edward Fischer have also described it as a movement that began with cultural and linguistic revitalization efforts (Fischer & Brown, 1996; Asociación Maya Uk’Ux B’e, 2005; Zapeta García, 2005) that have always transgressed the political towards self-determination. Self-determination, in the context of North American Indigenous peoples, has focused on land, territory, and rights claims. When it is put into conversation in the Maya context, the concept of self-determination strengthens Maya identities and communities, and extends analysis beyond the usual external identity markers of Maya languages and regalia. A section in chapter 7 explores the importance of the external factors that differentiate the Maya from the rest of the non-Indigenous populations, but also their limitations given the complicated colonial history of genocide, repression, and colonialism. However, for those outside of the movement, this particular moment in history marked a point from which demands for education from Indigenous perspectives began to flourish.

Since the 1960s, and as an extension of the liberation and civil rights movements in the United States, Canada and Africa, the Indigenous movement in Guatemala found entry into the
political arena. Decolonization efforts in the former British colonies (e.g., Canada, New Zealand, Australia, and the United States) entail a “process of unlearning historically determined habits of privilege and privations, of ruling and of dependency—such a difficult intellectual matter that we cannot acknowledge our past or present location and simply get on with business” (Mohanty, 1996, p. 108). These ideas began to influence some intellectuals, although the analysis often came from within socialist and class-based struggles. I concur with Victor Montejo’s (2005) observation that this illustrates that:

Ladino paternalism does not always respond to Maya needs and visions of the future, even when it is believed to be revolutionary [and yet] … Despite the manipulation of the Maya popular movement … the experiences acquired by the Maya people was necessary [even if] their leaders did not anticipate the consequences of their actions and exposed many of their followers to danger and death. (p. 125)

During this period, educational opportunities for Indigenous peoples came in the form of literacy programs and the creation of the Indigenist Institute, charged with implementing such programs. The continued erasure of distinct Indigenous identities, cultures, and languages within Guatemala during the revolution meant that education in Indigenous languages or based in Indigenous epistemologies could not flourish (Rickemberg, 1987; C. Smith, 1990). Further, the goal of education was to assimilate Indigenous peoples through castellanización and convert Indigenous language speakers into Spanish speakers. This effort had two effects. On the one hand, the proliferation of new schools in urban centers did not lead to an increase in the number of Indigenous students, who often lived in outlying regions, in the system. The Rigoberta Menchú Tum Foundation (FRMT in Spanish) and UNESCO (1997) jointly reported that during these 10 years, coined as the revolutionary period (1944–1954), the goal of civilizing and Christianizing Indigenous peoples continued and in no space did discussions regarding cultural and language difference arise (FRMT & UNESCO, 1997; Rickemberg, 1987; Taracena Arriola, 2002). Therefore, the government’s “emancipatory” policies during this time were also problematic. On the other hand, having learned the Spanish and receiving schooling produced a class of Indigenous professionals with the capacity to negotiate and organize.

Bishop (1998) posits that emancipatory theorists deny the agency of Indigenous peoples when they profess that they can “provide answers for problems faced by the ‘oppressed people.’” If only the oppressed could know what the detached, distanced emancipationist knows, the lives
of the oppressed would be improved” (p. 213). Conservative politics, on the other hand, see people’s value as largely economic. Neither ideology addresses the issues of cultural difference, racism, and the saliency of race to the dynamics that privilege certain classes and groups while trampling the rights of the marginalized. Nevertheless, educational policies to abolish illiteracy were implemented, albeit with different purposes in mind. First, the revolutionary period sought to increase literacy in order to assimilate Indigenous peoples into the socialist state. Second, the conservative government increased the number of educational centers, allegedly to decrease the social, economic, and political gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

The messages sent to Indigenous populations about education and the revolution itself centered on a socialist, leftist discourse and praxis. It also promoted Darwinist and secular views of social order and further validated Western notions of objectivity (L. T. Smith, 1999, p. 62; Leonard, 2009). Because the Church, a conservative institution, saw the revolution as a communist and atheist threat, it reacted by, during the counterrevolution, supporting the anticommunist, conservative regime of Arias Castillo. Consequently, education became a tool to reinforce patriotic values, strengthen the nation built on colonial and racist attitudes. This epistemological foundation promotes the continued assimilation and cultural genocide imposed on Indigenous peoples today. Sadly, the projects in which Indigenous peoples participate often replicate this dogma precisely because they aim to reform and include Indigenous peoples and not change the power relations that systematically exclude us from actively defining our future. A case in point is the educational reform, whereby MIK is added on to existing Western systems of thought and not treated as a valid knowledge on its own.

During the period 1954–1960, some of the above advances were halted; however the model of socioeconomic modernization expanded to affect more of the country, including the Indigenous communities in the highlands. This period saw improvements in health care and greater market cohesion at the national level, which increased stratification based on racialized, gendered and classed categories (Rickemberg, 1987, p. 18). The Catholic Church, through Acción Católica, contributed to the apparent secularization of the Roman Catholic religion by promoting literacy and economically productive projects along with creating peasant cooperatives. History books in the national curriculum for public education describe this stage as one that brought social and economic chaos for the underclasses, focusing on responses to
external pressures to liberalize the economy such as an attempt to return to feudal landowner relationships with Indigenous and peasant populations through land reform efforts to redistribute the land usurped by large, foreign interests.

Researchers in Guatemala have coined this the counterrevolution era (1954–1960) as during this time, the United States and Russia were engaged in an ideological war pitting democracy against communism (which was often confused with socialism). The conservative government’s alliance to the United States forced a liberal form of trade and production (Lefeber, 1984; Schlesinger & Kinzer, 2005) and also led to the control and annihilation of any activity labelled socialist or communist.

This brief historical timeline provides the context for the strengthening resistance of the Indigenous population. This resistance sets the background for the signing of the Peace Accords in 1996. I now focus on the period post-1996 because it marks the start of the government’s ratification of a series of international and national agreements intended to bring justice, equality, and peace to all sectors of Guatemalan society, but specifically to Indigenous groups because of the extent to which the war had ravaged these communities. One of these important international agreements is Convention 169 of the International Labor Organization (ILO), which recognizes the existence of collective rights for Indigenous peoples. It proposes the creation and fostering of state-funded Indigenous educational institutes at all levels, educational programs in Indigenous languages, the use of popular media for Indigenous programming, and the production of educational materials in local languages.

An analysis of this legal and policy framework provides a background from which to tease out and explain some of the complex factors that have transformed and inhibited the implementation of the State’s commitments to reform education to meet the needs of Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations. In order to understand the specific context of the Indigenous education demands, it is appropriate to describe the general situation of education in the country, particularly around issues of quality and access. These two factors were the driving force behind the education programs developed and implemented by the state since 1996.

**General Issues in Education in Guatemala:**

**Access and Quality**
Access and quality are a focal point for many education policies and represent points of contention between educators, policy makers, and politicians and even within groups working to further the goals of Indigenous education. The document, “Construyendo sobre lo Construido: A Diez años de los Acuerdos de Paz / Building upon existing structures: Ten Years since the signing of the Peace Accords,” published in 2006 by the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC in Spanish) provides an overview of the educational achievements and pending tasks from 2004–2008. Upon reading the document, it becomes evident that the quantitative comparison of school attendance, enrolment, drop-out rates, coverage, quality, pertinence, access, and equity—among other factors—since the signing of the Peace Accords does not take Indigenous epistemologies into account. It does, however, provide a hopeful look at the factors necessary in order to truly provide an “Education for All,” which is MINEDUC’s program and logo. But how much of this is pertinent to the efforts to create and revitalize education from Indigenous perspectives?

According to one education expert, the differences between education based on individual rights versus education based on collective rights needs analysis. During our interview, I asked about the major challenges to constructing an education system based on Indigenous knowledges and languages versus one based on democracy and individual rights. The main issue is:

La distancia que hay entre el pensamiento Maya y la visión política desde pueblos Indígenas con la visión política oficial. Esa distancia ha sido uno de los retos que más hemos tenido que buscar permear y es una cuestión de visión entonces. Cuando hablo de visión, estoy hablando de ideología, o sea, de tendencia ideológica, de visión política, y tal vez de visión acerca del valor mismo de las culturas y de los Pueblos Indígenas mismos. El significado que tienen los derechos colectivos de los Pueblos Indígenas además del derecho individual, creo que el sistema sigue viendo a la educación como un derecho individual pero no ha caído todavía. O sea, ha sido muy renuente el sistema para abrirse a la visión de la educación como un derecho colectivo. Y en tanto al derecho colectivo, que también responda a las características propias de cada colectividad. En este caso, que sea mucho más pertinente a las culturas. Esta distancia entre las dos visiones creo que ha sido y va a seguir siendo uno de los principales retos que tenemos.

The gap between Maya thought and political vision and the official [state] vision. We have tried to narrow this gap and so it becomes a question of [differing] visions. When I speak of vision, I refer to an ideology, a political vision, and perhaps about the very values of Indigenous cultures and peoples. This means that
the collective rights of Indigenous peoples surpass individual rights, [but] I think the system continues to view education as an individual right. … So education needs to open up to a collective rights perspective and the collective rights need to address the needs of all of the groups that comprise this collectivity. Thus, the gap between the two visions has been, and will continue to be the main challenge we have to confront. (Pedro Us, January 16, 2008)

One of the issues pertaining to Indigenous rights is precisely the fact that the government committed itself to creating, promoting, and implementing relevant education for all. For Indigenous groups, the signing of the Peace Accords became an important normative tool through which to demand the inclusion and active participation of Indigenous peoples in the educational reform process, while also ensuring that education reflects the linguistic, social, cultural, and ethnic diversity of the country. The Peace Accords (PAs) became national law in 2005 and gave more legal weight to Indigenous demands. The aforementioned report does mention many gains since the implementation of the PAs, especially regarding increase in children’s access and decrease in drop-out rates, and portrays a dismal view of the possibility of constructing a system that reflects the diversity in Guatemala.

One of the main factors reflecting the government’s political will to make Indigenous education a reality is that Spanish remains the official language for the entire country. Having one official language while only recognizing the existence of Indigenous languages trickles down to the public education system, where Spanish remains the dominant language of instruction. The PAs did motivate the government to accept some Indigenous language pilot schools and projects funded by international cooperation agencies as a symbolic gesture, with the promise that they would review the results in order to consider the feasibility of implementing new content for a new curriculum. But the content of this new curriculum, to date, are in the form of books published by Maya organizations such as the National Congress on Maya Education (CNEM in Spanish) and some of its members such as the Intercultural Education Program for Central America (PROEIMCA in Spanish), the Santiago Development Project (PRODESSA in Spanish), and the Rigoberta Menchú Tum Foundation (FRMT in Spanish). However, as a participant shared, “the government is very slow to review the materials and even slower in printing enough copies to provide to all the schools” (Telón, March 6, 2007). Her comment is not an unfounded musing. Grigsby (2004) and Asturias, Grigsby and Othelten
(2000) report a declining budget allocated for bilingual education, and even less for bilingual intercultural education. With this apparent lack of political will and the reductions in budget since the signing of the Peace Accords, the support for these efforts has dwindled. Therefore, it needs to be asked whether the Constitution and the state will be the apparatus through which Indigenous demands, particularly around education, will become a reality. I further explore this question in chapter 7, in relation to Indigenous conceptualizations of nation and citizenship.

Citizenship in Guatemala is clearly founded upon a person’s ability to access the rights, freedoms and guarantees found in the Constitution. Guatemala has witnessed 12 different revisions to the constitution since it gained independence from the Spanish Crown in 1821 (Bastos & Camús, 2003a). These different versions have reflected the ideological tendencies of the government in place. Since talks began to end the civil war in 1985, the idea of constructing a nation based on Western and democratic ideals started to take shape. The 1985 Constitution—still in effect today—includes reforms that guarantee individual rights and responsibilities for members of all the diverse cultural and linguistic groups in Guatemala.

In terms of education, Article 71 of the Constitution begins with a preamble that guarantees freedom in teaching. This section specifies that the state’s role is to “facilitate and guarantee adequate education to its entire people without any discrimination” (Martinic, 2003, p. 3). Article 72 defines the objective of education as the holistic formation of human beings and declares it is in the national interest to instruct all in matters pertaining to the Constitution and human rights. Article 73 guarantees freedom of education and recognizes parents’ right to choose how they educate their underage children. Article 74 describes the education to be provided, stating that it is “the right and responsibility of all people to preschool and 9 years of basic education,” (Fuentes, n. d., pp. 6) all of which is to be provided free by the state, and should emphasize subjects such as technology, science, and humanities. Because of the limits in access and quality of education the literacy rates were low. The Constitution declares illiteracy to be an urgent matter. It also highlights the need to decentralize the education system to allow it to reflect the diverse and pluricultural character of the nation, stating that education for Indigenous peoples should be bilingual (Spanish and a Maya language). The Constitution also declares that

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9 Illiteracy in this context is illiteracy in the Spanish language, not in any of the 23 Maya languages, Xinka, or Garifuna.
the private sector has a responsibility to create and maintain schools, daycares, and cultural centers for its workers and their children while insisting that the state is responsible for promoting salary increases for its teachers.\textsuperscript{10} In spite of these constitutional advances, the reality remains that education, in particular bilingual and intercultural education, is neglected as evidenced by a lack of funding and political will to improve the condition of its schools and training of its teachers (Poppema, 2009).

**Integration of Issues and Legal Frameworks to Address the Multiplicity of Factors Affecting Education**

Demetrio Cojti (2005) points to the rise in legislation that—at least in theory—advances the collective rights of Indigenous peoples in Guatemala and the Maya in particular. History holds some clues regarding the philosophical foundations for the exclusion and exploitation of Indigenous peoples, not only in Guatemala but around the world. The legal frameworks that support Indigenous educational demands are due, in part, to the combined efforts of the traditional left along with Maya traditional activists, scholars, community leaders, and Elders.

The Constitutional Reform of 1985 finally granted Indigenous peoples citizenship and the right to vote (Bastos & Camús, 2003a). Until this point, Indigenous peoples in Guatemala had not been considered citizens of the nation-state. However, Indigenous peoples’ engagement with the state is, at best, paradoxical. Although they are now positioned to demand their rights through their participation as citizens, in reality it is the state and its notion of citizenship that blocks the fulfillment of Indigenous peoples’ desires and interests. This issue is further discussed in chapter 7 where I propose the development of a new kind of citizenship that centers spirituality.

One advance made through the signing of the PAs was the creation of the CNEM. As the top authority on Maya Education, the CNEM (2007) has proposed to “Revise all current laws and policies in order to avoid limiting the decentralization process of education … The decentralization model will only work if there also a decentralization of resources and it should be enough in order to fulfill all of the commitments assumed” (p. 25). There are a number of

\textsuperscript{10} For a more detailed description of the contents of the Constitution pertaining to education please see MINEDUC& UNESCO’s report *El Desarrollo de la Educación en el Siglo XXI* (2004).
laws and policies affecting education today, but this dissertation only focuses on those resulting directly from the signing of the Peace Accords as they reflect the spirit of Convention 169 of the ILO. The significance of the legal frameworks resulting from the PAs lies in the fact that they provide the legal tools and justification for the demands of Indigenous groups and the laws to enforce them.

One of the most important pieces of legislation came into effect on January 19, 1991, when the government decreed the National Education Law which sets out the principles and goals of education (Decree 12-91). This law promotes the normative legal framework in The Constitution and includes a section on bilingual education (BE). The section referring to BE (Chapter 4, Article 56), defines it as a “response to the country’s characteristics, needs and interests, in places where the linguistic and ethnic diversity is high and which takes place through programs in education subsystems, be it within school systems or extracurricular systems” (Grigsby, 2004, p. 23). Article 57 states that the “objective of BE is to affirm and strengthen cultural identity and the values of the different linguistic communities … and Article 58 states that education “in the corresponding languages of each sociolinguistic region shall occur at any level of instruction” (Grigsby, 2004, p. 24).

I have so far described in a general manner, some components found in the national and international legal frameworks supporting the creation of a relevant, decentralized, and diverse education system. The laws supporting their implementation reflect little of the situation on the ground. The government’s lack of commitment, shown by its refusal to increase the budget as necessary for the implementation of these important legal advances, illustrates the state of Indigenous education in Guatemala. An important legislative issue relates to the atomization of laws by sector: education, health, economy, development, and Indigenous peoples. Because Indigenous peoples are treated separately, their needs are not met with funds from the regular budgets for the different government services, education among them. Failure to create integrated budgets leads to a failure to deal with the factors that are preventing children from accessing education in the first place and challenges the creation, promotion, and maintenance of an education appropriate to the diverse population in Guatemala.
The aforementioned normative and legislative advances have contributed to the realization of a minimum of the laws, agreements, and legislation in support of pluricultural, bilingual education. However, the creation of a number of state bodies focused on Indigenous issues has also resulted in mechanisms that have the potential of ensuring Indigenous peoples demands are met. Some bodies, such as the Defensoría de la Mujer Indígena / Defender of Indigenous Women (DEMI, for its name in Spanish), created in July 19, 1999, concentrate on creating public policies to increase Indigenous women’s participation in political, social, and cultural spaces in Guatemala. As well, the Comisión Presidencial Contra la Discriminación y el Racismo / Presidential Commission for the Eradication of Discrimination and Racism (CODISRA, for its name in Spanish) was created in 2002 as part of the executive branch of government. It provides legal support and follow-up in legal cases involving racism or discrimination against Indigenous peoples. Other organizations are FODIGUA (Fondo de Desarrollo Indígena), focusing on Indigenous economic and social development; the Commission of Indigenous Communities in Congress, whose main mission is the creation, formulation, and proposal of laws that seek to increase Indigenous peoples’ participation at all levels of government; the National Commission for Reparation Efforts, created after the PAs in 2004, works to obtain retribution for the victims of the armed conflict; the Defense for Indigenous Peoples, created in 1998 through efforts of the Human Rights Procurement Office, works toward legally sanctioning any human rights violations against Indigenous peoples and applying all international and national agreements and legal frameworks; and the National Academy for Maya Languages in Guatemala (ALMG), which was established in 1990 with a mandate to create norms and regulations recognizing the use of Maya languages and Xinka and Garífuna (OAS, 2004, p. 44).

Not only are organizations outside of the MINEDUC producing texts that support Indigenous education, specifically for the Maya, but the ministry itself is doing its part. A participant informed me that there are books and teacher guides available from MINEDUC in 13 languages, and material available in three more languages ready to print. During our interview, Pedro Us (January 2008) stated that the barrier, however, is that in order to print this material, the ministry has to allocate funds for it and at the moment it is unclear if this will be.
An example of efforts to create education proposals in response to the general needs of marginalized groups and Indigenous groups specifically is a document created by the Unity of Native and Popular Indigenous People (UIO-P), in which they propose plans, approaches, strategies, and demands to transform education in Bolivia. This decolonization effort, it argues, needs to take place at the ideological, political, territorial, and sociocultural levels and it needs to promote self-determination in these realms as well:

For the native Indigenous nations, the production of a curriculum for the whole of the plurinational education system should take as its starting point the world view, territorial, cultural and linguistic reality of the communities. This curriculum should include the universal knowledge for the education of life and for life itself. (UIO-P, 2004, pp. 63–64)

Likewise, the CNEM has also put forth a series of recommendations for educational reform. I refer to these documents as the Maya Proposals for Educational Reform (MPER). These documents comprise published and unpublished proceedings and statements regarding Maya education which began with the work done by the Standing Commission on Education Reform Commission since 1998 (CNPRE in Spanish), and that became foundational for drafting the Education Reform Design (see Asturias, Grigsby & Othelten, 2000, pp. 463). As a group, the CNEM provides a guide to understanding the different components of Maya Indigenous Education (MIE). The documents are created from the proceedings and discussions held at the Congreso Nacional de Educación Maya / National Congress on Maya Education, held annually in different cities since 1998. They continue to serve as the guide for creating effective strategies, enriching the curriculum, and making recommendations to the MINEDUC about what diverse Indigenous groups want from education: mainly, a true pluricultural (and not just intercultural), bilingual education.

Through the interviews conducted, it became clear that not everyone involved in Indigenous education is aware of the different modalities and terms that exist to define the basis for the demand for Indigenous education, the definitions of the terms used, and the extent to which their programs overlap with those for which MINEDUC is supposed to be responsible. The above is an introductory attempt to highlight some of the terms and actors in the struggle for Indigenous education in Guatemala.
Implications of Diverse Actors in Education:  
Towards an Indigenous Model of Education

The impact of both U.S. colonialism and patriarchy on Native American peoples, especially women, has been to accomplish a further erosion of their Indigenous rights as the earliest groups in the Americas. For Native American women, this has meant a double burden because they must deal with both racist and sexist attitudes, and with the discrimination that results from such prejudices … [which] can be described as “patriarchal colonialism.” (Jaimes-Guerrero, 2003, p. 65)

In Guatemala, the continued domination of non-Indigenous social, spiritual, political, and cultural organization has affected the respect for, and place of women within the community and their role in decision making. For example, the diminished active political participation in community and government bodies by women not only is an indicator of their diminished status; it is also an indicator that Indigenous men have accepted a Western and imposed way of being in which the oppression of women is expected. Furthermore, scholars who only focus on the male aspect of leadership, participation, and decision making by erroneously stating that Maya culture is patrilineal (Bracamonte, 2004) irrefutably deny Indigenous Maya women’s agency and participation in resistance and decolonizing processes, as expressed by a research participant (Telón, March 2, 2007). This contradicts the Indigenous notion that all parts of a whole are equally important and that roles are not solely based on gender. It is possible to analyze this inequity from the perspective of Jun Winaq’, which contributes to theorizing and putting into practice a culturally and epistemologically grounded alternative to gender imbalance. This analysis can lead to transformation grounded on Indigenous teachings and, thus, instead of separating Indigenous women from their communities it can bring healing to all peoples. This can only happen if everyone—men and women—are willing to take responsibility for their own actions, healing, and transformation.

Not respecting Indigenous epistemology in relation to women’s roles has implications for the manner in which education is constructed, imparted, and promoted within and outside of Indigenous communities. The participants in the study all agreed that sexism and patriarchy are very much alive and present in social relations in Indigenous populations just as they are in non-Indigenous populations. Their position reflects an analysis of the insidious nature of gender violence based on colonial history. It also points to the danger of not recognizing the agency and
role each person has to heal and transform in order to end injustice. As Andrea Smith (2008) eloquently asserts:

Because even many Native sovereignty and other social justice movements have not sufficiently challenged heteropatriarchy, we have deeply internalized the notion that social hierarchy is natural and inevitable, thus undermining our ability to create movements for social change that do not replicate the structures of domination that we seek to eradicate. (p. 312)

The healing must begin with the acceptance, as the participants shared, that we are all implicated in this problem. Healing gender imbalance requires healing and transformation at an individual level first and then at a community level.

A contribution of Maya Indigenous groups, as well as other Indigenous groups, is a praxis that values women’s and men’s roles equally based on the understanding that if one part is missing there can be no wholeness. Indigenous peoples living by their own epistemology, axiology, and ontology recognize the value of women’s roles. To fail to do so constitutes exclusion akin to that arising from colonialist attitudes and individual interests.

For Maya women and men in Guatemala, education has the potential to revert this situation since currently:

La educación Maya, actualmente, no es intercultural porque solamente se mencionan a las diferentes culturas Indígenas y no se está haciendo educación desde la cultura Indígena, en este caso, desde la cultura Maya. Uno de los ejemplos más notables es el uso del Calendario Gregoriano para definir el inicio y el término del año escolar en vez de utilizar el Año Nuevo Maya. Desde este punto de vista nos damos cuenta que el marco de referencia para la educación es Occidental.

Maya Education, at present, is not intercultural because [one can see] it only mentions the different Indigenous cultures and is not an education based on Indigenous culture, and in this particular case, on Maya culture. One of the most notable examples is the use of the Gregorian calendar to define the beginning and end of the school year instead of referring to the Maya New Year [Tzolk’in calendar]. From this perspective, we realize that the framework used for education is Western. (Francisco Puac, Education Expert, CNEM workshop, February 22, 2007. Author’s own translation.)

The quote above reflects the discussions on education that are taking place. Education experts at CNEM (Workshop on Indigenous Education and Maya Cosmovision, El Cuntic
Village, February 22, 2007) continue to address the possibility and need to create new theories based on Indigenous epistemology. Their position reflects how current policy borrows from Western theories such as constructivism, post-structuralism, modernism, and postcolonialism. Discussed at the workshop was the growing number of scholars who are beginning to address issues of decolonization through these theoretical positions. I address this issue in the next Chapter, where the theoretical foundations that guide this dissertation are explored and positioned. I also discuss the possibility of future research aiming to contextualize my theoretical foundations within Indigenous Maya knowledge. However, what is important to acknowledge is that the group seemed to agree that decolonization for Maya peoples revolves around our own philosophy and knowledge, grounded in a circular, cyclical, and holistic epistemology. In order to develop Indigenous education, the policies to promote and implement the restructuring of the current system require that all actors involved (Indigenous communities, international cooperation agencies, non-governmental and governmental organizations) understand the implications of basing their programs, plans, and policies on Western epistemology. As well, knowledge produced by Indigenous scholars around the world needs to be taken into account and shared in dialogue, especially as it pertains to the analysis and creation of new ways of thinking and creating knowledge. These issues are further addressed in Chapter 5 where ancestral knowledge is discussed in the context of reclaiming and putting into practice the elements that bring balance to individuals, communities, regions, and the universe.

Indigenous Maya Knowledge is applied to a certain extent in the newly formed National Base Curriculum /Curriculum Nacional Base (CNB in Spanish). The CNB is the result of many years of work by the CNEM, community leaders, and educators and brings Indigenous knowledge into the formal state education system. It is not exactly an Indigenous education system, but it has the potential to begin a process of reflection to help all sectors of society to see the importance of learning from Indigenous cultures, knowledge, and understandings.

An important aspect of introducing a different, non-Western method to training educators, as well as measuring the success of the CNB, is to understand that, for Indigenous peoples, measuring and success have different meanings. For example, I am going to generalize in order to exemplify what I mean. In Indigenous thought, success is not measured by quantifiable means. It is often shown through a person’s change in attitude, service toward the
community and willingness to become an example of what living in balance means. In contrast, a Western definition of success, particularly in school, is measured by a final grade, an indication that a linear progress towards the perceived mark of success is attained. This measure is often defined as getting high marks in school, or as adults, measured in how much money we make or the material possessions we are able to acquire. Measuring the qualitative aspects of education, such as an increased understanding of Maya culture, values, and traditions cannot be done using tests that measure how much a student knows (Dei, 1995, p. 188). Instead, as proposed by professionals in the study (Workshop, January 30, 2008), goals might include increased appreciation of the culture and identity markers, participation in local sociopolitical affairs according to students’ abilities and gifts, and working for the community’s benefit. The issue of creating safety nets to safeguard Maya Indigenous knowledge from outsiders also came up during some interviews and is an issue that is beyond the scope of this dissertation, albeit one that needs further development and research in the context of Indigenous education in Guatemala.

Further Thoughts

In this section I discussed some of the factors that have informed the direction education has taken in Guatemala. Some of these factors, which intersect in novel ways, produced the educational reform after 1996. This reform provided hope that education will, one day, at least acknowledge the validity of Maya knowledge. The hope is that this initial recognition will promote processes that will redress acts of violence against Maya identity and spiritual practices. It is evident that the discussion on how to make an education system outside of the State system is still in its early stages of discussion and need further debate. These are but only some issues addressed in the context of demanding Indigenous self-determination within a rights discourse and within state tools.

I also dedicated this section to a careful analysis of selected historical events that have strengthened the sociopolitical and economic control of the ladino and criollo elite (Bastos & Camús, 2003a, 2003b; Casaús Arzú, 1992; Stavenghagen, 2002). I emphasize the imperative of creating the Indian through colonial definitions and institutions in order for the elite to maintain control. It is evident that educational institutions provided the arena in which to create the
imagined Indian as one seen through racist lenses. These definitions and constructions of *Indianness* particularly affected Maya peoples through the designation of the Indigenous population as a *problem*. Today, as we begin to analyze this discourse and its real implications on state policies aimed at solving this problem through the creation of a universal citizen, we can also turn the problem upside down through education. Therefore, the recent efforts to validate Maya culture and peoples have also focused on an education that seeks to validate Indigenous peoples and knowledge. Nevertheless, the recent formation of the Maya Movement has revealed two distinct (among many) kinds of proponents whose focus is not education. On the one hand, there are those who want to work with the state in order to reform its foundation—the Constitution. On the other hand, there are those proponents focused on revitalizing Maya political and social systems in order to highlight Indigenous collective rights, specifically, the right of self-determination. The two positions are further discussed in Chapter 7.

But also under the umbrella of the Maya Movement, organizations such as the CNEM have focused on developing recommendations for education reform as well as for community-based Maya education (CNEM, 2004, 2007). It is clear from this brief summary that the tensions arising within the movement warrant further discussion. But what is shared by the majority of the participants is an understanding that educational reform is only a first step in creating a Maya education system. Under this logic, the National Base Curriculum exemplifies a way to address the particular needs of every ethnic and cultural group in Guatemala. Its flexibility and adaptability to different contexts is its strength. However, it is also a challenge to contextualize the curriculum given that government spending in the area has not increased and teacher training has not proven effective in providing the pedagogical tools needed to deliver this education. Moreover, there is little incentive for educators to participate given the negative track record government has shown in two areas. First, it is notorious for withholding pay, which in turn causes teachers to strike (Prensa Libre, 2008, pp. 16—17). Secondly, it also fails to pay a salary premium for bilingual teachers, so the teachers are forced to take up other employment in order to support themselves and their families (Pedro Us, January 16, 2008). This reality comes about as a result of the state’s inability to pay their teachers the salaries owed in general, and the premiums in particular.
The lack of commitment government has shown towards education in general and Maya education in particular is not new, and in Chapter 7 I further discuss how government is complicit in maintaining the status quo. This status quo is founded upon the power–knowledge nexus that has devalued Indigenous knowledge, Indigenous peoples, and our contributions to society. The relevance of analyzing knowledge production processes lies in making the connections between these conditions and colonial history without amputating the latter (Trask, 1991). The next chapter grounds the theory used to analyze education in Guatemala with the intention of providing alternatives to these social problems from an Indigenous Maya and decolonizing perspective. I show that acknowledging, reclaiming, and living Indigenous knowledge reaffirm that Maya peoples and knowledge have never ceased to exist. Further, this process also demonstrates that colonization didn’t end with independence.
Chapter 3
Roots of the Ceiba: Contextualizing an Indigenous Decolonizing Theoretical Framework


Contextualizing Indigenous Peoples and Indigeneity

In this section, I discuss the politics of who can claim an Indigenous identity and the concept of Indigeneity. Understanding the dimensions of the term Indigenous peoples can elucidate who possesses Indigenous knowledges. It nuances the assumption that being an Indigenous Maya person automatically results in supporting and practicing Maya values and philosophies. Therefore, it is appropriate to first, provide a working definition of who is Indigenous. Given the power relations inherent in knowledge production, it is important that Indigenous bodies produce this type of scholarship in the academy. My stance does not essentialize Indigenous people or ghettoize them in Indigenous standpoints. Rather, Indigenous knowledges should be open as a point of reflection and engagement with the academy and for
academics that insist on decolonizing these spaces. Ally work is important, but, as critical scholars interested in decolonization, we need to understand the colonial apparatus that deems dominant bodies and their perspectives as expert, while Indigenous or minoritized bodies are usually relegated to the margins. The important question is: How do Indigenous academics working from Indigenous standpoints disrupt Euro-American ethnocentrism and invite dialogues that privilege multiple centers of knowledge?

Who Are Indigenous Peoples?

The question of who is Indigenous is central to any discussion of Indigeneity and Indigenous knowledges given the Western, colonial assumption that once a people is uprooted from its traditional territories, its knowledge and connection are lost. Indigenous scholars such as Denetdale (2006, 2008), Mihas (1998, 2004), Cook-Lynn (1990) have highlighted the danger of culturalizing Indigenous and Native Studies, that is, letting discussion of representation and identity issues take away from the larger discussion of the political goals of Indigenous nations and peoples. In other words, I take this position to mean that we also have to consider the political dimensions of culture and language survival as a way to anchor discussions about contemporary shifts in Indigenous identity that do not preclude assimilation or a loss of the values and ways of being that distinguish Indigenous from non-Indigenous peoples. The implications for constructing just and balanced gender relations, education systems and citizenship models rely on these critical explorations.

This discussion – and the ways in which Indigenous peoples in general, and the Maya in particular – use cultural and language revival and survival as the political basis for their demands for specific rights, is also a necessary academic exercise given the array of peoples who have come to claim an Indigenous identity without understanding fully the responsibilities this claim carries. In the context of education and knowledge production, it is relevant to ask the question of who is Indigenous given the power of the dominant ideology to delegitimize and exclude Indigenous bodies discursively in favor of dominant (White) colonizing bodies, bodies that take the role of experts (Cook-Lynn, 1990; Dei, 2000, 2011; Mihas, 1998). I am not suggesting that all Indigenous peoples put their Indigenous knowledge into practice, or that all practices of Indigenous peoples are Indigenous, in what L. T. Smith calls pro-Maori and anti-Maori in the
context of New Zealand (1999, 251). Certainly, Indigenous peoples are diverse and yet, find ways to connect on very foundational levels. But, I find it is useful to consider some characteristics that nuance and disrupt static notions of Indigeneity as it appears to the colonial and Western gaze. For this purpose, I look to the United Nations Indigenous Working Group (2004) to provide some guidelines for identifying Indigenous populations. This group decided that, while a universal definition is not necessary, some defining characteristics, such as self-identification, acceptance by the larger group or community, long-term occupancy and relationship to the land, descent from Indigenous groups residing in a place prior to colonial contact, and the maintenance of traditions, customs, and language, are useful. Throughout this dissertation, I rely on these characteristics, understanding that there are both generalities that differentiate Indigenous from non-Indigenous groups, and that groups are inherently heterogeneous and distinct within their own communities.

Although I try to focus on distinctions between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledges, they do not always fall into neat categories. Working from an Indigenous decolonizing perspective assumes each member of a community is distinct and holds personal traits that cannot be generalized. Beyond this, there are also questions regarding the exclusion of Indigenous peoples who live outside of their original territories; where do they fit based on these parameters? This issue is important to observe and I believe the situation of people of African descent in Guatemala, the Garífuna, illustrates how. Describing the Garífuna population as Indigenous is an example of the effort to acknowledge Indigenous peoples who have been displaced due to colonization and slavery.11

Scholars who call attention to the need for Indigenous identities to be “imagined differently so that the unique positioning, especially of diasporic Africans can be accorded a space to theorize the particularities of their experiences” (Adefarakan, 2011, p. 34) address important issues of inclusion and exclusion in academic discursive frameworks with real implications for a citizenship model informed by the relationship one has to a land that one does not belong to (Churchill, 2003, as cited in Dei, 2011, p. 24). In other words, what connects

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11 The Garífuna are descendants of Africans who were enslaved and who shipwrecked en route to the Americas along the Caribbean coast. They currently live in countries from Belize to Guyana. This group was recognized in the 1985 Constitution as an Indigenous group, although there is an understanding that they are not the original inhabitants of the Mayab.”
Indigenous peoples who have been forcibly displaced to a land that has also been colonized? How do displaced Indigenous peoples navigate their relationships to the Indigenous peoples of the territory they currently occupy? I believe an Indigenous decolonizing theoretical (IDT) approach acknowledges this issue through understanding the rights and responsibilities that come with claiming an Indigenous identity in material and spiritual ways. What I am suggesting is that being Indigenous implies that individuals making that claim and connection also take the time to engage and support neighboring Indigenous groups, or, for those living in diaspora, to align with the rightful owners of the land they currently occupy. These efforts seek to dismantle the colonial apparatus that continues to impose colonial relationships upon all. For example, I reconcile this issue through my scholarship and praxis, developing relationships where colonialism and injustice are contested, regardless of whether I am on my traditional territory or elsewhere. In other words, Indigeneity in an educational context is intrinsically tied to issues of responsibility, accountability, and a politics that seeks to validate and express Indigenous knowledges on their own terms.

The work of Afro-Canadian scholar George Dei (2011) is useful for discussing the elements that tie Indigenous peoples, Indigeneity and knowledge centers in an effort to decolonize educational spaces. Although his context is that of Ghana, his country of birth, his philosophical and theoretical foundations ring true with the struggles for epistemic self-determination (L. T. Smith, 2005) and decolonization based on Indigenous knowledges in global contexts (Dei, 2000, 2011). Further, Dei’s work is unique in that it critically analyses the dynamics of power hierarchies within Western constructs of knowledge. Such critical academic work, based on Indigenous knowledge, is rare in Latin American scholarship on education. The work of the Intercultural University Amawtay Wasi (2001) and of Kichwa scholar Nina Pacari (2005) in Ecuador are only a few examples of this scholarship in addition to the work of Maya scholars mentioned in this dissertation.

Dei’s Indigenous discursive framework is appropriate to my own work, particularly because of my argument that Indigenous Maya knowledge seeks balance. Balance, thus, is the other side of hierarchies and competition. Competition is a foundational element in Western education, to the effect that these structures “are only meaningful in a competitive culture. The competitive nature of these communities itself helps reproduce ‘Othered’ subjects… Indigenous
epistemology sees difference as embodiment of knowledge, power, and subjective agency. Creating an ‘Otherness’ is about power and control” (p. 29) Although he borrows from the Foucauldian concept of the power and knowledge nexus to create what Said (1978) has termed the *Othered* subject, his explication resonates with my earlier statement about the need to disrupt colonial imaginaries and existing power differentials through academic engagement in resistance as allies to local Indigenous peoples. The main issue here is that, as Indigenous peoples, we must understand that our similarities unite us and our differences allow us to engage in ways that differentiate us from mainstream Euro-American, ethnocentric cultures. Therefore, as Dei (2011) states, “to claim the ‘Indigenous’ is not an end in itself. It is simply a means to an end, that is, decolonization” (p. 11). Further, the label Indigenous assumes a global connection based on common experience with colonization, imperialism and exclusion, but also of hope, dreams and transformation for a just and balanced world. It is reason for referring to a global *we* in the dissertation: the common threads that unite Indigenous peoples in spite of our distinct contexts and diversity.

As Indigenous and decolonizing advocates, our analysis cannot ignore the complexities and adverse impacts of colonialism on Indigenous peoples’ identities and histories. On this point, I agree with Battiste (2000a, 2000b), Dei (2000, 2011), and L. T. Smith (1999) that, as Indigenous peoples, our role is not only to reclaim Indigenous knowledges to affirm our identities, but also to safeguard them from being essentialized, appropriated, and misused. The issue of protecting Indigenous knowledge is tied to the issue of who can claim Indigeneity.

Tied to the concept of Indigenous identity is the concept of Indigeneity. Throughout this dissertation, I engage Indigeneity as the political positioning of Indigenous peoples, particularly those who live outside of their original land and territories (Cannon, 2011b; Dei, 2011; Lawrence, 2005; Sunseri, 2011). I use the term Indigenous to refer to global Indigenous peoples and cultures, to denote the heterogeneity in Indigenous epistemologies, languages, and experiences. Indigeneity is a useful concept to differentiate between Indigenous and Aboriginal peoples. The latter is used to denote “uninterrupted long-term occupancy of a place” (Dei, 2011, p. 25). In my case, I am Maya Ach’i and my connection to this is parallel to the land/knowledge connection that exists between Aboriginal peoples and their territories in Canada. My maternal lineage is based on the Maya Ach’i language. Because I no longer reside on my traditional
The territory, it can be said that I can no longer claim uninterrupted, long-term occupancy of the place. Regional and international displacement does not preclude Indigenous peoples from connecting through oral stories and diverse modes of being that center Creator. This suggests that perhaps differences need to be put to rest in order to focus on the political project of decolonization and walking in a way that will bring balance back to our world. In this way, working with the concept of the colonial as “anything imposed” (Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2001) is useful because it ties Indigenous peoples to issues of colonialism, displacement, migration, and resistance.

The distinction between these cultural identities is important for establishing the commonalities that bind Indigenous peoples together for the purpose of making sense of our diverse, yet contemporary existences. These commonalities (and their nuances) are found in the metaphor of the Ceiba. It demonstrates and example of how Indigenous peoples’ relationships with one another and with Creator are formed within a cyclical time and space. In other words, the value of sharing promotes respect among all peoples and provides constructive ways to dialogue around the messy and conflicting views on mainstream concepts of competing knowledges. I want to now share a personal story about how my theoretical positioning developed over the years because it illustrates my motivation for undertaking this research.

**Grounding Indigenous Decolonizing Theories**

For Maya Indigenous peoples, cosmology parallels epistemology. Cosmology refers to the diverse ways in which Maya peoples come to know and understand diverse realities, including what Castellano (2000) refers to as “revealed knowledge.” This revealed knowledge is acquired over different spans of time, space, and place, particularly during ceremony. I borrow from Shawn Wilson (2008) to contextualize its purpose as “to build stronger relationships or bridge the distance between aspects of our cosmos and ourselves” (p. 11). In this sense, engaging in ceremony is an intrinsic aspect of Indigenous knowledges in general and in particular for Maya peoples. The fact that some contemporary Maya peoples engage in ceremony demonstrates that spirituality is at the core of the culture. Following Maya scholars Alvarado & Coz (2003), Sac Coyoy (1999), Vásquez (2003) and Camey Huz et al (2006), I posit that Indigenous decolonizing theories (IDT) must center spirituality and, thus, promote ways to bring balance
back between the material and nonmaterial worlds. Other characteristics also differentiate IDT from non-Indigenous theorizing. These include the use of concepts that catalyze social justice and the analysis of power between/within living and nonliving beings. This section demonstrates the need to ground my theoretical framework on Indigenous knowledges. It also maps out my assumptions and the literature that supports my analysis of the social, material and political dimensions of knowledge produced in the academy. Throughout, I posit that centering and living by the teachings found in Indigenous knowledges can provide the tools by which to decolonize. In this context, the pedagogical implications of Indigenous education are that, through this praxis, healing from the effects of colonization, particularly the exclusions tied to gender, ethnic/cultural and citizen identities currently made by nation-states, can occur.

Spirituality, as a cultural practice for Indigenous peoples, is a main factor that differentiates Indigenous from non-Indigenous (Western) knowledge systems (Battiste, 2000a, 2000b; Castellano, 2000; Dei, 2000, 2011; Ermine, 1995; Iseke-Barnes, 2003; L. T. Smith, 1999; Wane, 2006, 2011b; Wane & Ritskes, 2011, Wane & Waterfall, 2005; Wilson, 2003, 2008). Stating this does not imply that Western knowledge systems lack spirituality, but it does highlight the West’s claim to secularization while simultaneously promoting Euro-American Christian values (Shahjahan, 2005, 2011). It is not my intention to create a dichotomy between different systems of knowledge, as I recognize the heterogeneity of knowledge systems, whether Indigenous or colonial, and, thus, the existence of multiple centers of knowledge (Dei, 2000; Dei, Hall & Rosenberg, 2000). Maintaining a dichotomy would deny the diversity and multiplicity of experiences embedded within these systems. Despite this, there are some parameters and challenges that I address in writing from an IDT perspective. One of them highlights the challenges of describing, writing about and in a way, atomizing the spiritual foundations of Indigenous knowledges in general. While my intention is not to compartmentalize the spiritual nature of Indigenous knowledge, I understand the challenges and limitations of discussing it in a Western, academic and atomized context. This section attempts to describe some of the links between the spiritual nature of Indigenous knowledges and how these threads have informed my research process and analysis.

IDT builds on the work of Indigenous scholars who have already established some parameters for differentiating their ways of knowing from Western ways. Indigenous
knowledges are “dynamic, experientially based, holistic, relational, and connect the physical, metaphysical, and the cosmos” (Semali & Kincheloe, 1999, as cited in Dei, 2011, p. 24). In addition, while Indigenous knowledges are dynamic (Dei, 2000, 2009), they still retain some fundamental elements over time. While I do not claim that Western knowledge systems are monolithic or static, I do recognize that the above listed essential characteristics differentiate them from Indigenous knowledges.

Another critical characteristic of Indigenous analysis is that it goes beyond discursively contesting Euro-American ways of understanding the world. Indigenous knowledges engage with Western knowledge by proposing different ways of understanding and acting in the world. There is a need to debunk the Western universalist approach to creating and disseminating knowledge to create space for multiple ways of knowing. In this multilogicality, I follow Ermine (1995) in suggesting that Indigenous epistemology is a valid framework from which Indigenous peoples around the globe are creating a living theory based on their understandings of the world. Indigenous theories challenge the hegemony of Western theories and knowledge production (Pillai, 1996, p. 218) by suggesting that experiential knowledge forms are valid. Decolonization, in this context, refers to not only discursive terrains but also to day-to-day experience and practice (L. T. Smith, 1999). A participant shared some of her insights grounding this characteristic in Maya culture:

La cultura Maya no es una cuestión de discursar sino vivir el tiempo que nos toca vivir y nuestra propia experiencia y creación de entenderla, los ancestros dieron las claves, pero el tiempo de ellos nada se parece al nuestro. Hay que tener la propia experiencia, crear la propia sabiduría, hay elementos dados pero esos elementos dados se pueden estancar sin la participación de cada uno y una. Un gran reto es que la cultura invita a recrear, hay elementos, hay principios y valores que por sí solos no se van a seguir dando sin que la persona se involucre totalmente dentro de esta práctica, el temor actual es que esto para la nueva generación es fácil de convertirlo solamente en un discurso, pero entonces ya no habría recreación de la cultura. Entonces lentamente esta cultura se muere y eso no es su fin, sino que su fin que cada generación haga su propia experiencia, construya su propia sabiduría es por eso que cuando entendemos el tiempo como ciclo quiere decir que somos una generación, cada generación construya, experimente, conocimientos similares y esos conocimientos deben aportar a las preguntas a las necesidades e intereses colectivos.
Maya culture is not about reciting speeches, but, instead, it is about living the time we are meant to live and from our own experiences. We need to understand our current context. Our ancestors gave us elements from which to understand our culture, but our present [context] is different from theirs. As such, we have to have our own experiences in life, create our own wisdom, and although there are elements in common, we cannot fully understand them if we are not participating in life from our positions and locations. Our culture thus challenges us to recreate and use the principles and values from our ancestors that can help us, but these alone will not make changes. This is the challenge for our new generations because otherwise, our knowledge becomes a discourse, and thus, our culture would cease to recreate itself. And if this happens our culture will slowly die, and this is not our ancestors’ goal. The goal is to have each generation live their own experiences and construct their own wisdom so that they can contribute to answering the pressing questions to the collective needs and interests of our culture. (Virginia Ajxup, July 2, 2007)

Virginia’s words also highlight her understanding of the collective nature of knowledge and its applications. Applying this knowledge is paramount to decolonizing scholarship. Its purpose is to support the political, social, economic, and spiritual goals of Indigenous communities—however these communities may define these goals based on their particular places and contexts.

In order to further illustrate how decolonization is taken up in this dissertation, I must explain how an Indigenous and decolonizing theoretical framework is appropriate for analyzing the ways in which Indigenous Maya peoples struggle to maintain and validate ancestral knowledge. This position takes up Andrea Smith’s (2005) challenge to “creat[e] those structures within our organizations, movements, and communities that model the world we are to trying to create ... an alternative system not based on domination, coercion and control” (p. 130). For this purpose, I would like to show how this position highlights nuances in the positions of Maya leaders and intellectuals who promote cultural values and spirituality without political intent.

Maya scholar Victor Montejo (2005) has called attention to the way that scholars erroneously characterize participants of the Maya Movement as either traditionalists (Fischer & Brown, 1996), or fundamentalists (Morales, 1996, as cited in Montejo, 2005, p. 66). Montejo
argues that this dialectical positioning obscures the heterogeneity within Maya resistance, mainly in its leadership. He describes four types of leadership: the militant leaders of the popular movement; the cultural leaders of the Pan-Maya Movement; the reactionaries who participated in the civil defense patrols; and the conservative and traditional Maya who kept their social and cultural life apart from the conflict (Montejo, 2005, p. 25).

Montejo’s (2005) observations highlight how resistance, as viewed through the lens of a Western hierarchy of power, ascribes value to and thus inequality between the groups involved. This power pyramid can be juxtaposed with Indigenous understandings of power. For example, dominant Euro-American knowing values competition over cooperation and taking over sharing; this constitutes ontological differentiations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous value systems. But to claim that Indigenous analyses cannot pinpoint dialectical/polar/oppositional power relationships obscures the fundamental goal of practicing Indigenous Knowledges. I posit that the hierarchy of values described above contradicts Maya understandings of life as relational, and understanding that allows us to analyze and dismantle hierarchies of power. Dismantling the value-laden hierarchy leads to balancing relationships and the achievement of harmony.

To illustrate, I posit that the Maya creation story contains a concept that can help everyone navigate through the messy terrain of power relations. This concept is found in the image of the Ceiba: Jun Winaq’. As already stated, this concept embodies the process of becoming complete, as in the completion of the cycles in the Maya calendar Tzolk’in. It also speaks to the relationships that connect all living beings and by extension, to the effects that each individual’s actions produce on one another and the universe. These actions can create harmony and balance, or the opposite. Therefore, a theoretical contribution stemming from the findings and recommendations of the participants is to propose the Jun Winaq’ as a Maya centered epistemology. This epistemology is foundational to Maya ancient knowledge. It is based on the local, context-specific content, that will ultimately inform the theoretical foundations of schooling, and that will produce new questions and raise new challenges for educational and sociological research. Following this logic, the process of becoming a complete being weaves itself through my analysis by asking: How would the Jun Winaq’ ground the theoretical framework? Would centering Jun Winaq’ as the unit of analysis help make sense of, and disrupt
the notion of hierarchies of power? Would this allow room for Maya Indigenous knowledge to flourish in spite of the social, economic, spiritual, political, and cultural norms imposed by globalizing forces?

**My Engagement With Indigenous Maya Knowledge in Education**

In Guatemala, Eurocentric ideas of modernity permeate its education system since it gained independence from Spain in 1821. L. T. Smith (1999) has suggested that Western research practices, in their attempts to uphold a neutral and objective gaze onto the Indigenous and marginalized “Other”, have become the authorized representation of Indigenous peoples. This paradigm, inherent in the enlightenment and positivist scientific traditions, purports the view that the written word had more truth and objectivity. Thus, when participants share their understanding of the teachings found in the *Pop Vuh*, their views differ from what I myself learned at school. Learning the *Pop Vuh* parallels reading a mythical story. There is no value ascribed to it, its teachings, or the way it illustrates Maya epistemology. Therefore, the participants and I agreed that, at an early age, students learn to differentiate between knowledge (read: Western) and myth (read: othered). Herein lies the necessity of centering Indigenous knowledges as the “central decolonizing tools of resistance against domination and colonization” (Adefarakan, 2011, p. 41).

The school system in Guatemala—whether public or private—relies on the same perspectives and pedagogical approaches for teaching history. When teachers are asked about the value of the *Pop Vuh*, they note that it has value because it was transcribed and translated by a Spanish priest from Maya oral stories. From speaking to many people throughout my life, I have also come to understand that the *Pop Vuh* embodies contradiction. On the one hand, it holds part of Maya Indigenous Knowledge. On the other, it is also an example of Orientalism applied to Maya cultures and peoples. In other words, the West (represented by Spanish Catholic priests and invaders) have produced knowledge about the Maya from their own perspectives and mediated through their own lenses. In the *Pop Vuh*, Orientalism is evident insofar as the translations from the Kich’e’ language incorporate Spanish worldviews and understandings, often mediated by a Catholic parallelism that at times obscures elements of Maya Indigenous Knowledge (Sam Colop, personal communication, February 2008).
The contradiction exists in the fact that, although the Pop Vuh represents Maya knowledge, the knowledge is obscured by its language (Spanish), meaning, and metaphors. To this, the late Sam Colop (1955–2011) responded with his own translation of the book based on his knowledge of Maya K’ich’e’ and his conversations with Elders and prominent archaeologists and anthropologists. As a linguist and Maya K’ich’e’ speaker, he dedicated 5 years of his life to rewrite the Pop Vuh using the tone, rhythm, and structure of the Maya K’ich’e’ language. Sam Colop’s work (2008) restores the knowledge derived from the story in the K’ich’e’ language. It more closely resembles the original stories and unmask some contradictions and inaccuracies in the other translations. It also contests and rights wrong information, such as the notion that Maya ancestors came from “the other side of the ocean” (Colop, February 2008). His translation is thus accepted as a closer representation of the words and meanings originally intended.

I had the pleasure of attending Colop’s book launch in February 2008 in Guatemala. As I sat there in the small community center in the heart of the Kaqchik’el village of San Lucas and listened to his speech, I began to understand why many teachers tell students the Pop Vuh is a myth and not history: the first translator, a priest named Francisco Ximénez, translated it with that vision. I became excited listening to a Maya K’ich’e’ scholar whose work values Maya Indigenous Knowledge in its own right. This contemporary example of decolonizing education strengthened my own determination to engage in decolonizing research. It also pointed to the need to validate Indigenous Maya Knowledge in its own right and to move away from a contestation of marginalized knowledges (Dei, 2011; Shahjahan, 2005).

I once believed that Maya history is only mythical and its lessons are not pertinent to today’s complex world. As Kovack (2009) states, “there are two general forms of stories [those that hold mythical elements and personal narratives of place” (p. 95). The Pop Vuh is an example of “a story that holds mythical elements that teaches of consequences, good and bad, of living life in a certain way” (Kovack, 2009, p. 95). As an example of Maya ancient culture and knowledge, the Maya creation story raises Guatemala’s stature to that of descendants of the Great Maya Civilization. As the basis for a discourse on nationalism, it elevates the nation to the status of other Western Civilizations. Charles Hale (2004) and Maya K’iche’ scholar Demetrio Cojtí Cuxil (2005) both refer to this tokenism as the basis for the creation of the Indigenous other as the antithesis of the ideal mestizo subject, who is seen as the modern ideal to reach. Still, like
so much of the ancestral Maya knowledge, it becomes merely a symbol of the grandiose Maya past with no effort made to connect it to present-day Maya peoples and their struggles and contributions. This is problematic because it devalues Maya culture today. This particular example is one scenario that calls for decolonizing approaches to theorizing and producing knowledge. And it also calls for the need to center multiple knowledges in education.

Similar to the metaphor of creation, the roots of the Ceiba represent the epistemological grounding for this dissertation. What is the work based on? What values are embedded in it and how do Maya peoples today live them? The roots are also a genealogical reminder of the historical paths that have led Indigenous Maya peoples to reclaim and uphold what colonization has wanted to take away from us since first contact. The roots of the Ceiba, as theoretical foundations, reveal not only a site of contestation of the imposition of colonization but also a confirmation that Indigenous knowledge has always existed. It demonstrates that “essentialisms that are grounded in Indigenous constructions for the self cannot be solely and simply measured in relationship to Whites, but rather, indigeneity also exists autonomously to serve important cultural and political functions that are empowering” (Lattas, 1993, as cited in Adefarakan, 2011, pp. 41–42).

The work of prominent Western scholars who support Indigenous issues (Bastos & Camus, 2003; Bonfil Batalla, 1987; Fischer & Brown 1996; Carey, 2004, 2006; Casaús Arzú, 1992; Gómez & Martínez, 2000; Hale, 2004; Warren, 1998) has opened up the possibilities of dialogue about Indigenous issues. The credentials and acclaim these scholars have attained for their work demonstrates the politics of knowledge production, whereby Indigenous scholars, activists, and communities who have theorized from Indigenous perspectives in the past have not garnered the same attention or been discredited for it. It is true that increasingly, the academy is recognizing the work of Indigenous Maya intellectuals like Demetrio Cojtí Cuxil, Victor Montejo, Alicia Velásquez Nimatuj, Sam Enrique Colop. However, the treatment of knowledge produced by dominant bodies in comparison to that of the “subjects” they study underlines the need to continue to write in ways that validate Indigenous philosophies and theories, particularly those developed by Indigenous peoples. This also applies to the work of Indigenous scholars such as Emilio del Valle Escalante (2009), Demetrio Cojtí Cuxil (1998, 2002, 2007), and Egla Martínez (2005) who still rely on Western theoretical lenses in their work in order to first,
engage with issues of power and the tensions created by colonialism and the ideology of Eurocentrism in order to center Maya Indigenous knowledge (del Valle Escalante 2009; Cojtí Cuxil 1998, 2002, 2007), and I would argue to also gain credence in the Western academy. This situation reflects that Indigenous theorizing is underrepresented. It also points to the diverse ways in which academics choose to conduct their work in their engagement with knowledges that provide useful concepts for the consideration of questions of power in the academy. This is yet another example of why there is a need to validate Indigenous philosophies and theorizing on their own merit (Dei, 2011; Lawrence & Dua, 2011) through an examination of each scholar’s epistemological foundations (see Sandy Grande, 2000 and 2004).

As an Indigenous scholar, I am aware of the relationship between knowledge produced in the academy and the policies created and implemented for Indigenous peoples. These policies impact us in material and spiritual ways. In response, it is imperative that knowledge produced in the academy is not only an academic and discursive exercise but also an active one (Dei, 2011; Grande, 2004; L. T. Smith, 1999). Academics supporting decolonization must render visible “othered” knowledges (Amin, 1989; Battiste 2000a; Said, 1978, Youngblood Henderson, 2000). Through the use of an Indigenous decolonizing lens, people interested in decolonization efforts can expose the sociopolitical role of knowledge production, particularly when knowledge in the academy has constructed Western and Eurocentric knowledge as the only body of valid knowledge. The unresolved tensions of the epistemological validity of Indigenous knowledges directly relate to racialized and gendered hierarchies of power that continue to legitimate the domination of Indigenous people (Blaut, 1989, 1993; Mignolo 2005; L. T. Smith 1999, 2005).

Western science and its findings are constructed and viewed as universal knowledge, which, in turn, informs Western education. Indigenous scholars and scholars of color contest this universality in the areas of research practices (Battiste, 1986, 1998, 2000a, 2000b; Bishop, 1998; L. T. Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2003, 2008), knowledge production and dissemination (Dei, 1995, 2008, 2011; Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2001; Dei, Hall, & Rosenberg, 2000; Grande, 2000, 2004; Graveline, 1998; Wane, Shahjahan, & Wagner, 2009), and educational reform (Amawtay Wasi, 2001; Cajete, 1994, 2000, 2010; CNEM, 2004). In Guatemala, the fight for social justice and the inclusion of Indigenous peoples and their knowledges also came as a result of their exclusion from “democratic” processes intended to reverse economic and political injustices that have
historically affected this population, even when socialist regimes promised improved socioeconomic conditions of the nation through the October Revolution (1944). As already alluded to in Chapter 2, the marginalization of Indigenous peoples and their political goals set the stage for strengthening the Indigenous Maya Movement of the 1960s and 1970s.

When I discuss decolonizing in the context of my theoretical framework, I ground my analysis and praxis on the knowledge of Indigenous Maya people living in the Mayab’, as well as the work of other Indigenous scholars around the world. As Indigenous academics, our distinct positions support efforts to value, impart, and promote the cultural and linguistic diversity in our specific contexts. In this particular situation, the task of validating multiple centers of knowledge (Dei, 2000; Dei, Hall & Rosenberg, 2000) becomes not only a political pursuit, but also one that seeks the preservation of these knowledges for the survival of Indigenous peoples. Decolonization also implies an anticolonial framework whereby I analyze the Euro-Christian, secular, patriarchal context in which we live. This stance allows me to also question who has discursive authority and how this affects Indigenous participation and theorizing from Indigenous contexts. In this complex relationship between academic and nonacademic experience, I understand that non-Indigenous scholarship has, in academic contexts, at least opened up the possibility of discussing Indigenous issues. Therefore, it is fitting that I also discuss the pertinence as well as the limitations of this scholarship.

Theories That Support Decolonizing and Indigenous Frameworks

At the outset of this dissertation, I state that this study intends to apply Indigenous scholars’ recommendations to create and disseminate knowledge from Maya perspectives, theories, and understandings in education. Throughout my fieldwork and during the writing process, I struggled to find a theoretical framework that would fit my own assumptions as well as promote a decolonizing project of validating Indigenous knowledges and standpoints. George Dei (2011) provides some elements of an Indigenous discursive framework that parallels my own. My decision to conceptualize and investigate the experiences of Indigenous Maya professionals, who uphold their Indigenous identity and knowledge in their engagement with education from Maya lenses, is an example of this. Mainly, I concur with Dei’s (2011) proposal that “spiritual identity and land are salient/fundamental analytical concepts offering an entry
point in understanding the lived experiences of those who are Indigenized” (p. 28). I extend his conceptual understanding of Indigeneity because it supports the idea that to break away from colonial impositions on the body, mind, and spirit, colonized peoples in search of decolonization must understand and heal from colonial history and reclaim each person’s strength through self-assertion. To illustrate, I refer to Dei (2011) to outline a few other characteristics of his Indigenous discursive framework that concur with my own proposition for an IDT:

(i) colonialism, in its deep-reaching denial of history and identity, has created unequal outcomes for groups in terms of their histories, engagement of culture and traditions, and spiritual identities; (ii) there are situational variations in intensities of different identities given the effects of colonization and re-colonization; (iii) central to decolonization for Indigenized and colonized communities is the urgency of regaining our spiritual power in strength. (p. 29)

Finally, I also want to echo the principle that states:

Indigenous knowledge is about searching for wholeness and completeness. This wholeness is a nexus of body, mind, and soul, as well as the interrelations of society–culture and nature. To understand is to have a complete, holistic way of knowing that connects the physical, metaphysical, social, material, cultural, and spiritual realms of existence. (Dei, 2011, p. 29)

This search for wholeness and completeness mirrors the Maya concept of becoming Jun Winaq’, a concept that grounds the analysis and theories of this dissertation and that emerged through the process of conducting the interviews, coding, and reflecting on the knowledge exchanges with the participants. It is also a concept that allows researchers and participants a chance to reflect from a culturally grounded position on how each person’s actions impede or catalyze the process of becoming whole. This process encompasses acknowledging the dynamics of Indigenous knowledge based on class, gender, racial/ethnic, and social difference as they inform, and at time even feed into, patriarchal ideologies that clash with the teachings that center spirituality, balance, reciprocity, respect, and truth. As Dei (2011) and Wane (2011) suggest, Indigenous knowledges are anticolonial in the sense that they disrupt colonial institutions, ideologies, enterprises, and ways of being. This is where the anticolonial and the Indigenous standpoints converge. They both seek ways to repair the wounds of colonization in distinct ways. The next section delineates some of these convergences and divergences.
**Anticolonialism and Indigenous decolonizing frameworks**

As already stated, I agree with George Dei’s (2011) proposal that a critical Indigenous discursive framework is necessarily anticolonial as it is about resistance, subjective agency, and collectivist politics. However, in an effort to make the language accessible to different audiences and pertinent to the context of Ixim Ulew (Guatemala), I engage anticolonialism with an understanding that the fact that there are similarities between the anticolonial and Indigenous decolonizing frameworks does not necessarily mean one has to ascribe to the other’s language. In other words, following Shahjahan (2005), I also ask: by utilizing academic language, do scholars and practitioners render institutional research inaccessible? As already mentioned, the issue of who has discursive authority cannot be overlooked, particularly as it creeps upon academics using highly specialized and non-Indigenous languages and concepts. It is important to consider bell hooks’ (1984) reminder that in the academic context, one form of writing is always privileged over others (hooks, as cited in Shahjahan, 2005, p. 231). If, as Indigenous academics, we always fit our inquiries and analyses into already existing frameworks for the sake of gaining academic credibility, then we are falling into the trap we are contesting in the framework that we are trying to rebuild.

I raise another challenge: through connecting Indigenous struggles and ways of being with anticolonial struggles that arose out of independence and nationalist movements, are we obscuring Indigenous frameworks? In other words, are we framing Indigenous struggles only within the context of the imperial (Western) nation-state? Without resorting to hierarchies of knowledge, I think it is valid to see anticolonial and Indigenous frameworks as dismantling colonialism in different ways. Indigenous frameworks are particularly important to this thesis because they describe the paths taken to analyze and overcome material struggles through spiritual reclamation and transformation.

My framework attempts to validate multiple knowledges (Dei, Hall & Rosenberg, 2000) in a horizontal manner. Even though academics and researchers choose a particular framework to provide a particular language to analyze the research experience, there must be a way in which to retain the Indigenous essence, concepts and values. In other words, when Indigenous and anticolonial scholars question the *post* in postcolonial undertakings, the need to address how and
if this occurs is valid issue to be critical of. I recall Lattas (1993) when he pushes back against critical inquiry and asserts that “Indigenous constructions of the self cannot be solely and simply measured in relationship to Whites, but rather, Indigeneity also exists autonomously to serve important cultural and political functions that are empowering” (Lattas, 1993, as cited in Adefarakan, 2011, p. 43). Therefore, in this Chapter I delineate where anti/postcolonial theories support, oppose, or raise further questions to create new knowledge in an effort to decolonize theory and praxis in the working framework I call Indigenous decolonizing theory. Further, it will demonstrate that this philosophical and discursive position places women at the center of Indigenous Maya society and views spirituality as the axis from which society operates. Spirit is the essence from which all life flows in an intrinsic relationship with the cosmos. From this vantage point, I will also demonstrate that gender cannot be atomized into a separate unit of analysis in an IDT framework because it is all encompassing.

**Anticolonial theoretical aspects of IDT**

For this section, I rely on a colleague’s detailed mapping of the terrain of anti/postcolonial studies (Shahjahan, 2005) as well as an analysis of George Dei’s (2011) edited collection *Indigenous Philosophies and Critical Education*. These works provide an analytical background from which to further nuance the convergences and divergences between anti/postcolonial standpoints and Indigenous and decolonizing lenses. I now discuss some of the points of convergence based on these works.

Anticolonial theory has evolved from its beginnings, illustrated through the works of Frantz Fanon (1967), Albert Memmi (1991), Ngugi wa’Thiongo (1986), and Mohandas Ghandi (1968), from a post-World War II stance from which national independence from colonial powers was sought, mostly in Africa, India and the Middle East, to today’s concerns with the vestiges of colonization. As noted by Dei (2006), history and context are crucial for anticolonial undertakings. For Indigenous scholars, when we call for reclamation of our particular past, it is to ground ourselves in our histories and to move forward with clear perspectives and understandings of how not to commit the mistakes of the past (Dei, 2006; Dei, Hall & Rosenberg, 2000; Trask, 1996).
These historical points of entry clearly reflect similarities between anticolonial and Indigenous decolonizing perspectives. Further, the need to address the political implications of Indigeneity in the context of contesting and reconstructing sites of oppression also bring these two perspectives together. However, it is my position that although these two bodies of work support one another, Indigenous decolonizing perspectives also address the spiritual dimensions of resistance in the context of attaining social justice for marginalized peoples in the form of healing.

While the work of Franz Fanon (1967) has called for collective violence in order to attain national liberation and Ghandi for nonviolent civil disobedience (Shahjahan, 2005, pp. 218–219), I view the relational aspect of anticolonial theory as one that renders invisible that spirituality—a central element in Indigenous knowledge—has always advocated for a process of becoming a complete being or Jun Winaq’. In other words, Indigenous resistance to colonization is not derived from concepts engendered out of a contestation to colonial powers: it is derived from the concepts inherent in Indigenous knowledge that have always been there and form the basis for Indigenous ways of being, much like Ghandi’s position. Following Alfred (2011), Smith (2008), Dei (2008, 2011), Lawrence & Dua (2011), and Wane (2006), I take Indigenous knowledges and resistance to be part of Indigenous peoples’ daily lives rather than exclusively part of an anticolonial movement seeking to replace one power with another.

The concepts embedded in the Maya creation story and the teachings of the Ceiba and the Jun Winaq’ remind researchers of the importance of interdependence, of the fluid and cyclical nature of knowledge, and, thus, of the relationships built on the commonalities we hold as living beings of the universe. To dismiss this framework as not being “critical enough” is an act of gate keeping that fosters the colonial notion that only one theory or epistemology can exist, that to accept one means the displacement of others. This dismissal is also the rejection of the understanding that the similarities between various Indigenous knowledges reflect the need for their discussion within a larger anticolonial framework. Furthermore, Indigenous scholars who base their analyses on culturally grounded epistemologies and concepts (Graveline, 1998; Jiménez Estrada, 2005; Kovack, 2009; Mayuzumi, 2005, 2011; L. T. Smith, 1999; Wane, 2006) illustrate the departure from academic ways of theorizing and communicating, which rely solely on material realities. As Shahjahan (2005) emphatically asserts, it is time that scholars walk the
talk and start to use Indigenous ways of knowings in their own writings. It is in the spirit of “walking the talk” that I take up this particular project of decolonizing using Indigenous lenses as a response to the participants’ recommendations to use Maya concepts to analyze issues of education, nation building, and gender in Ixim Ulew. In this process, I also hope that I have taken up Njoki Wane’s challenge to assess whether decolonization is truly possible in the academy (2006). In the next section, I address some useful terms from postcolonial discursive frameworks that can help us engage with Indigenous theorizing.

**Postcolonialism and IDT**

There are some scholars who use postcolonialism as a chronological marker and as a reminder that decolonization is imperative (Battiste, 1998, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c; Duran & Duran, 2000; Youngblood Henderson, 2000; Little Bear; 2000; L. T. Smith, 1999). To invoke it, however, is not necessarily to ascribe to it; many authors have raised the question of the appropriateness of the use of a Western term and attempts to reclaim its significance are contentious, critiqued for their privileging of Western foundations (Grande, 2003, 2004; Shahjahan, 2005; Wilson, 2003).

Shahjahan (2005) also posits that postcolonial discourse is in fact another phase of anticolonial thought, one that moves anticolonialism to the terrain of resistance to the analysis of knowledge produced by the West about the East, an extension of Edward Said’s (1978) *Orientalism*. Shahjahan states that “Said, Bhabha and Spivak demonstrate the shift of anticolonial discourse from agency and nationalist/liberatory discourses towards discursive analysis and direct scholars’ attention to the intersection between ‘Western’ knowledge production on the ‘Other’ and Western colonial power” (p. 222). He goes on to address scholars who critique this shift and mentions that Bhabha and Spivak are criticized because they “ignore the myriad forms of oppression that underpin the colonial encounter and reduce material relations of colonial power to the rules of language” (Shahjahan, 2005, p. 222). However, some observations made by postcolonial scholars such as Said (1978) support my position that non-Western societies are designated in exclusionist terms. In relation to gender, Trin Min-ha’s (1989) philosophy of “otherness” supports IDT’s position that “othered” groups can speak for themselves and no longer need the mainstream in-group to speak for them. IDT posits that
scholarship needs to move beyond a discursive framework and engage in acts of transforming current Eurocentric knowledges and languages (wa Thion’o, 1986) to counter cognitive imperialism (Battiste, 1986, 1998).

Decolonizing education makes sense in places such as Ixim Ulew, where public education, if any, is the system that most children and parents are likely to access. In a country where the majority of people belong to an Indigenous group, it makes sense to build a system that is decentralized, culturally and linguistically pertinent, and involves Indigenous content, perspective, and ways of organizing not one designed solely to create more labor for capitalist and globalizing forces, but to provide the tools for people to live in dignity. Indigenous scholars such as Dei (2002, 2008) and Ermine (1995) have stated that fragmentation and irrelevant education systems hurt the spirit. Further, in a country still dealing with the trauma left by war and violence prompted by a sense of non-Indigenous superiority, the devaluing of Indigenous centers of knowledge amounts to epistemological racism (Scheurich & Young, 1997). In sum, the philosophies and theories shaping decolonizing education also make room for different discourses. Through the transformation of universalizing educational approaches, theories, and pedagogies we can start engaging difference rather than merely naming it. Healing can begin from here.

Postcolonial discursive frameworks are useful in analyzing the Foucauldian power–knowledge nexus, particularly in reference to Indigenous knowledge in its relation to dominant Western discourses on “truth” (Foucault, as cited in Adefarakan, 2011, p. 42). These lenses can help scholars, students, and communities engage with constructive concepts that can help in the analysis of a particular situation. However, I have to question some scholars’ sole and even primary use of these analytical lenses to address Indigenous issues. An example of this type of scholarship is the work of Emilio del Valle Escalante (2009) whose literary analysis of seminal works by prominent writers in Ixim Ulew demonstrates the tendency to fit Indigenous issues within already established canons that, on the one hand, allow scholars to engage in discussions about Indigenous issues and yet, on the other hand, diminish the validity of Indigenous knowledges and concepts as foundational analytical points. It is not a dialectical position pitting one knowledge against another, but, rather, a question regarding the modes of decolonization each scholar discursively and practically applies. To illustrate, del Valle Escalante (2009)
explores issues of educational reform and nation building from the Latin American postcolonial school of coloniality vs. modernity, as espoused by Walter Mignolo (2005) and Anibal Quijano (2009). He uses the concept of the coloniality of power\textsuperscript{12} to address the material impact of the colonial representations of Indigenous peoples in the minds of the nation, to advance what he calls a “project of decolonization.” The concept is useful in contexts where the audience is largely academic and in areas where Indigenous theories have not had the space to flourish. However, I want to center decolonization outside of a discursive context, within Indigenous spirituality and knowledges keeping the Indigenous communities in mind. Although I am aware that most of the language we use in academia is inaccessible to most peoples, I attempt to connect this issue to particular Indigenous Maya understandings of the context, analysis, and application of Maya concepts in the research. I am also aware of the freedom we possess as academics to choose the theories that fit our research. Further, I do not assume that all Indigenous scholars ascribe to Indigenous conceptual frameworks by virtue of their Indigenous identity, but I want to raise questions regarding the political goals of various decolonizing projects. What does it mean and what are the political, material and spiritual goals? I believe these questions are valid and require the discipline to make room for other ways of theorizing, analyzing, and measuring research findings.

**Theoretical Implications of IDT for Gender and Nation Building in Education**

As already stated, anticolonial discursive frameworks engage issues of Indigeneity to analyze the relationship between colonization and nation building. Nation building in the Western sense requires the creation of a centralized system of governance, as well as a uniform national identity. This identity depends on understandings of culture that are not independent from the economic, political, or social power dynamics in the world (Hall, 1997). In this sense, *culture* is used to represent a society or a group of people and becomes a source of one’s identity.

\textsuperscript{12} Quijano (2009) defines this concept as: “That specific colonial structure of power produced [in] the specific social discriminations which later were codified as ‘racial,’ ‘ethnic,’ ‘anthropological,’ or ‘national,’ according to the times, agents and populations involved. These intersubjective constructions, product of Eurocentered colonial domination, were even assumed to be ‘objective,’ ‘scientific’ categories, then of a historical significance. That is, as natural phenomena, not referring to the history of power. This power structure was, and still is, the framework within which operate the other social relations of classes and estates.”
a national or state character that, “differentiates ‘us’ from ‘them,’ almost always with some degree of xenophobia” (Said, 1978, p. xiii).

It is important to connect the notion of cultural politics to state ideologies that construct a homogenous picture of citizens. In this section, I want to first address how academic and Western constructions of gender have in fact created a divide between the centers and margins in knowledge production. This divide is clearly not neutral and originates in colonial history. Rauna Kuokkanen (2007) reminds us that:

   The academy must recognize its colonial history and acknowledge that its structures perpetuate the practices and discourse of exclusion and foreclosure. In other words, the academy must acknowledge and address its ongoing denial of and studied ignorance about indigenous [sic] epistemes. (p. 150)

It is in this spirit that I want to first discuss the various forms of feminism that are implicit in this exclusion while at the same time offering the possibility of working across difference.

   Feminism has come a long way since its early stages when no effort was made to engage issues of race, colonization, and sovereignty. Seminal works such as Beth Brant’s *A Gathering of Spirits* (1988) and Paula Gunn Allen’s *The Sacred Hoop* (1992) are among the first texts to question publicly whether Indigenous women could be feminists and whether feminism could make space for Indigenous issues. As a strategy, it allowed critical work around issues of gender oppression and its connection to colonialism to illustrate agency and self-representation in the context of gender violence and also colonization. Since then, the argument that feminism only serves the goals of Western, White, middle-class women is losing its strength, especially given the work of second- and third-wave feminism since the 1960s. Third-wave feminism builds on efforts to end discrimination, particularly around race and a homogenizing notion of femininity and feminine ideals. This body of work includes third-world and transnational feminists whose work is beyond the scope of this dissertation (Jackie Alexander, Ella Shohat, and Gayatri Spivak, Audrey Lorde, Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga, and Chela Sandoval). These theorists have made important contributions to feminism by highlighting diversity and the heterogeneity of women’s experiences, goals, and ways of theorizing. However, I tend to agree with Sandy Grande (2004) and Andrea Smith (2008, 2009) that these positions—albeit useful in other contexts—ignore the Indigenous genocide upon which nation-states are built. Therefore, to
endorse a project that works within the rights discourse and Western nation-state framework renders mute the possibility of imagining a different kind of nation and, most importantly, of attaining sovereignty and self-determination.

Thus, the notion that Indigenous feminisms belong to a “Fourth World” (Ouellette, 2002) makes sense since this diverse and emerging body of scholarship engages issues of decolonization, sovereignty, and self-determination. To date, Indigenous feminists (Archuleta, 2006; Cunningham, 2006; Deerchild, 2003; Denetdale, 2006, 2008; Green, 2007; Kahaleole-Hall, 2008; Kauanui, 2008; LaDuke, 1997; La Rocque, 1997, 2007; Mihesuah, 1998, 2004; Ouellette, 2002; A. Smith, 2005, 2008; St. Denis, 2007; Stewart-Harawira, 2007) have raised critical questions regarding the implications of creating feminism as a monolith that in no way allows for the discussion of Native or Indigenous feminisms. They caution about the dangers of limiting gender discussions to a dialectical positioning of feminism versus Indigenous issues since this obscures the histories, potential, and possibilities of women-of-color feminisms to inform and further Indigenous women’s struggles. In this vein, Ramírez (2008 & 2009), Kauanui (2008), and Kahaleole-Hall (2008) question whether feminism is, in fact, a Western or White construct, given that gender equality is inherent in most Indigenous cultures. These debates create further tensions. However, these tensions could be fleshed out in Guatemala, if the academy actually discussed these diverse tenets of feminism. As it stands today, the study participants reported a shared belief that feminism in Guatemala is currently taught and discussed as a monolithic body of scholarship that espouses White, middle-class, liberal, and homogenizing ideals using gender as the only unit of analysis (Personal observations; Kuokkanen, 2007). There is at present little or no discussion about how the contributions of Indigenous women or women of color could broaden discussions neither on feminist positioning nor about the particular potential of Maya concepts and philosophy to address gender and feminist assumptions. I posit through this section that as Indigenous women we need to discuss these issues across geographical boundaries and languages in order to discuss Indigenous women’s struggles, hopes, and strategies for change based on our similarities and differences.

In considering my own position, I recognize that the analyses of Native/Indigenous feminists are helpful in engaging feminist objectives as theories that have the potential to advance Indigenous women’s issues in Guatemala. For instance, since colonialism and
heteropatriarchal systems of domination affect women everywhere, why not have Indigenous philosophies and standpoints to theorize and reflect upon the paths Indigenous peoples, specially women, want to take towards transformation? In other words, to dismiss Indigenous epistemologies and philosophies as not critical enough to address inequality is akin to devaluing Indigenous women’s knowledge. I posit that this position raises questions about the types of knowledges, discourses, and philosophies valued in academia. Further, it illustrates the colonial stereotype that Indigenous philosophies are not critical enough to be applicable to contemporary issues. Why not validate all positions in an effort to engage and heal together? On this point, I would like to highlight Sandy Grande’s (2004) seminal work, which claims to “refuse to engage and replay the micro-politics of tribal-centric discourses [to] transgress prevailing codes of ‘mainstream’ Indigenous writers” (p. 4). While her position mainly speaks to the Whitestream “desire to preserve the images and fantasies of the white man’s Indian […]” (Grande, 2004, p. 4), I maintain that the diverse Indigenous theories, philosophies, and concepts push the academic boundaries and strengthen the field of Indigenous education. It is about making room for other ways of understanding the world, ways that do not necessarily rely on academic or non-Indigenous deconstructions of reality. Again, it is part and parcel with academic freedom.

Academic freedom entails contesting the existence of a single feminist perspective, particularly the Whitestream feminism that emphasizes “individuality … who wanted more equality with men in the prevailing patriarchal sociopolitical structures in U.S. American society and who premised their struggle as democratic ideals for gender equity” (Jaimes-Guerrero, 2003, p. 59). Contesting this from Indigenous perspectives means that non-Indigenous women need to listen and accept that Indigenous women’s realities of marginality are not always a one-dimensional problem having to do with the false stereotype that patriarchy is inherent in Maya culture. The notion that men oppress women in rural areas, or anywhere for that matter, is not seen as a malaise that also affects non-Indigenous men. Rather than identify this oppression as a product of colonization and Western systems of social order, Whitestream feminisms vilify the culture and ask Indigenous women to unite in their fight against men. Instead, anticolonial and Indigenous discursive frameworks support each other in allowing for more nuanced attention to be paid to the entanglements of gender and power, and how they figure(d) in colonizing and imperialist systems of oppression. This system of oppression includes the premise upon which Western nation-states are founded: the genocide of Indigenous peoples and the theft of
Indigenous lands. Distinguishing itself from Whitestream feminisms, an IDT does not prioritize gender as a unit of analysis; instead it takes as its unit of analysis the process of a human being becoming Jun Winaq’ in order to prevent injustice and inequality. In other words, becoming whole as an individual or society is a gendered and political process that requires going deep within to determine whether or not each person’s actions—as individuals who form part of a collective—are impacting the universe in a way that cultivates peace, unity, and life.

Referring to Jun Winaq’ as a unit of analysis to understand and transform gender oppression should not be dismissed as lacking academic rigor or political direction. On the contrary, centering my analysis on Jun Winaq’ allows my research to move beyond a recounting of the devastating impact of colonization and how it disrupted/interrupted and changed social constructions of gender. It makes room for reflecting from within and outside of Maya culture on patriarchal dominance and violence against women in particular, and all living beings in general. Jun Winaq’ suggests that the responsibility to become whole and balanced lies on everyone, despite the impact of colonization. It moves the study beyond a preoccupation with victimization to an awareness of the responsibilities each woman and man has. Contrary to the notion that healing and nurturing is only women’s responsibility (La Rocque, 2007, p. 65), it also moves beyond the debate of whether to apply non-Maya concepts in gender-free Maya languages. I further address the implications of using feminist language in Maya contexts in Chapter 5. I also address why the political goals of my scholarship can in no way be understood to parallel the goals of mestizaje (miscegenation). This is because, although mestizaje decenters Whiteness and essential definitions of Indigenousness, “it remains problematic for Indigenous formations of subjectivity and the expressed need to forge and maintain integral connections to both land and place” (Grande, 2004, pp. 115–116). In other words, the erasure of Indigenous identities through the invocation of in-between spaces renders invisible Indigenous anticolonial struggles based on the centrality of land and place in Indigenous identity constructions.

Anticolonial theories that discuss culturally relevant constructions of gender, such as the work of Adefarakan (2011) and Wane (2006), support my position that Western education shifts the social positioning of Indigenous students within their own communities. In Guatemala, participants expressed that a students’ success is not only measured by their potential to improve their socioeconomic condition, but also by the extent to which they also work toward improving
the social and political goals of their communities (Choguaj, June 06, 2007; Telón, March 02, 2007; Ventura, June 19, 2007). This shift affects Indigenous students’ economic and political positioning whereby their “success” becomes the community’s success, but only if their Indigeneity is maintained. Likewise, dealing with the issue of gender oppression necessitates the adoption of a lens that allows for the reclaiming and practice of the concepts that guide Maya peoples to walk in balance. Similarly, the Native feminist work of Andrea Smith (2008) and J. Kehaulani Kauanui advocate for a nonmonolithic approach to analyzing gender relations, because, they argue, it oversimplifies the different layers of difference and resistance and thus, renders Native women’s approaches to decolonization invisible: “the very simplified manner in which Native women’s activism is theorized has made it difficult to articulate political and scholarly projects that simultaneously address sexism and promote Indigenous sovereignty” (p. 242). It also addresses a topic that I do not discuss in the dissertation but that is relevant to the \textit{Jun Winaq’}: the concept of wholeness does not imply that only heterosexual relationships make a person whole. On the contrary, following Beth Brant (1988), Patricia Gunn-Allen (1992), and using the Maya Tzotzil concept of \textit{meleitik}, or two-spirited people, I recognize the need to acknowledge the roles, functions, limitations, and possibilities of \textit{meleitik}.

Finding balance in society through having control over ways of social, political, and cultural organizing alludes to some fundamental aspects of Indigenous self-determination and sovereignty. The political aims of Indigeneity contest Western feminist and gender analyses that ignore land-based claims and the history of colonization in a country. Further, it is important to keep in mind Alfred’s (1999) warning that, “by accepting the fiction of state sovereignty, Native communities negate their own power, determining that they will forever and only remain in a dependent and reactionary position to the state” (Alfred, cited in Grande, p. 52). Therefore, issues of self-determination need to come to the fore in order to present Indigenous women’s demand to be able to articulate our understanding of sovereignty as a state of consensus (S. R. Lyons, 2000) in which all benefit equally. In trying to reclaim Indigenous Maya ways of being that honor women, Indigenous Maya women link the past to the present and future, while most Western feminisms are trying to forget the past (McIvor, 1999, p. 173). Further, this reclamation implies that critical understandings of the gap between Indigenous philosophies of balance and healing need constant attention. It also suggests the need for Indigenous women and men need to
take our responsibilities seriously and truly bring that balance back. The issue of current praxis and healing towards attaining balance is further discussed in Chapter 6.

The intersections between land-based claims and ways of being are often ignored and attempts to impose a cognitive alliance between Western feminisms and Indigenous women based on a universal understanding of gender, class and race continue. Thus, although with good intentions, Western feminisms often serve to erase Indigenous historicity and specific rights based on the relationship to not only the land and place inhabited for centuries, but also to the metaphysical and cosmological aspects inherent in that relationship. As a result, Western feminisms continue to fuel internalized racism and othering of non-White, non-European peoples while also lumping all non-White women into a category that renders us helpless and in need of emancipation by the enlightened and liberated Western women. This is just another example of how Whiteness, in all spheres of dominant society, perpetuates the myth that Europeans are civilized and the rest are not (Battiste, 2000a; Blaut, 1993; Graveline, 1998; Kovach, 2009; L. T. Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2003, 2008).

Gender distinctions based on fixed but equally valuable roles include the right to participate in and own the public and private spaces women occupy differ greatly from Western notions that first, separate public from private spaces (see L. T. Smith, 1999, 51), and then assign economic and political worth to only those positions in the public sphere. On this note, some Indigenous feminists (Cunningham, 2006; Jaimes-Guerrero, 1997, 1998, 2003; Hernández Castillo, 2002, 2005; Kauanui & Smith, 2008; Smith, 2005, 2007; Ouellette, 2002; Trask, 1996) and tribal feminists (Deerchild, 2003; Gunn-Allen, 1992) tend to see patriarchy as an imposition from the outside (patriarchal colonialism) and make direct links between the modern understanding of capitalism and the undervaluing of the unseen and unpaid work women and men do (Grande, 2004; Jaimes-Guerrero, 1997, 1998 & 2003; LaDuke, 1999; Trask, 1996). Others reject the label of feminist outright (Hookimaw-Witt, 2006; Medicine, 1993). And still others have constructed hybrid approaches, such as the use of the classification of Indígena (Grande, 2004).

In the context of Guatemala, Grande’s approach as Indígena makes sense. As an Indígena, Grande identifies herself as an Indigenous woman, so that her identity “remains
grounded in the intellectual histories of indigenous [sic] peoples … [and] its spatial orientation derives from the deep connection among indigenous [sic] conceptions of land, identity, sovereignty and self-determination” (p. 172). The importance of Grande’s identification is that it highlights the similarities in values among women across Indigenous cultures, in spite of their differences. For example, what ends up being called *matriarchy* in discussions about the sociohistorical organizations of Indigenous communities is better seen as a complex system in which men and women in complementary roles share power. There is no simple relationship, then, between western and Indigenous feminisms because, as Andrea Smith (2005) points out, “these theories are not monolithic and cannot be simply reduced to [a] dichotomy” (p. 118).

Indigenous feminism is a new body of theoretical work slowly permeating the academy, but, like any other knowledge produced in institutions of higher learning, it is often not accessible to the general population it claims it is aiming to reach. Any knowledge produced in academia faces a similar dilemma; to resolve it scholars must take it upon themselves to disseminate the knowledge being produced.

In Guatemala, where liberal (White) feminisms are the only gender theories being taught in higher education, we can see the growing divide between the group described as *feminist* and Indigenous women. This dichotomy makes it difficult for the two groups to engage with one another on their own terms and from their own standpoints. This example shows that Indigeneity and decolonization are salient issues that Western feminisms need to take up, particularly for women in the South. As a result of this divide, Indigenous women can either declare themselves as feminists, at the risk of erasing their Indigeneity, or not, and lose an opportunity to address power imbalances in their society, albeit imbalances that have arisen due to colonialism. However, I would like to bring to the fore Andrea Smith’s suggestion that it is time that Indigenous women move beyond contesting White women’s and feminists’ racism and, instead, engage in the project of Indigenous feminism: work toward sovereignty and self-determination (2009).

Even I, who has access to these various feminisms, have a hard time declaring I am feminist. I follow bell hooks (1984) when she claims that she supports feminist ideals without labeling herself a feminist. I also support Sandy Grande (2004) when she claims she is *Indígena*. Again, her position illustrates that there are parallels between feminist theory—whatever stream
you may want to cite—and Indigenous desires to attain justice when a wrong is committed, when imbalance permeates society due to changing social, political, economic, spiritual, and cultural contexts. In other words, those of us who do not ascribe to feminism(s) still see the need to build bridges and weave together a world that is diverse and just from each person’s particular experiences and lenses. My argument, though, does call for reflection upon the ways in which Indigenous women are often forced to use feminist lenses in order to be validated. As Indigenous women with the political imperative to decolonize and heal, we need to make room for Indigenous conceptualizations, understandings, and theorizing so that it, too, is a choice among other theoretical and discursive tools to address inequity.

As discussed above, these Western feminist lenses render Indigenous understandings of gender, gender relations, and gender oppression rooted in Indigenous languages and epistemologies invisible. It is transformed into discourse that is no longer a static version of Indigenous but rather a mixture of Western understandings, language, and concepts that drive each person’s actions. Feminism in its diverse tenets has a particular language that it claims as its own; failure to adopt it marginalizes and excludes those of us who are trying to apply Indigenous philosophy and conceptual understandings to our analysis of injustice. And although the scholarship of Native feminists such as Andrea Smith (2005, 2008), Lisa Kahaleole Hall (2008), and Luanna Ross (1998) complicates the notion that feminism is a “White” construct, I believe that for women who theorize differently and outside of academia, it is pertinent to ask: Does one have to be a feminist to understand injustice?

In discussing issues that affect Indigenous women, feminists of any persuasion should accept that there are other ways to theorize. In the spirit of what feminists themselves claim—a contested, fluid, and diverse body of work—feminism needs to navigate collaboration and alliance on the basis of other analytical frameworks, such as those proposed by Indigenous women. It is only then that we can fight against any form of exclusion or imbalance from our own locations without privileging particular forms of language and expression. Following Potter’s (1995) statement that, “Perpetuating dominant frameworks on already suppressed Indigenous spiritual beliefs is harmful not only to the students but to other educators” (as cited in Ritskes & Wane, 2011, 73), I propose that it is time Indigenous concepts be accepted as valid in their own right and not in reference to and within feminism(s). An example of this is the work of
scholars such as Paula Gunn-Allen (1992). In her influential work *The Sacred Hoop*, she highlights the matrilineal nature of precontact Indigenous cultures through the stories in the collection, thus centering the feminine in native traditions.

Indigenous decolonizing standpoints center decolonizing action and call for the reclamation and maintenance of Indigenous ways of governance. Anticolonial thought furthers the analyses of colonial history to critically ask: “how has colonialism as a theory, a project, praxis and discourse, managed to produce and reproduce itself—politically, socially, culturally, materially, and ideologically” (Wane, 2011a, p. 281). Wane (2011) suggests that for African peoples, it is also necessary to “revisit, glorify and acknowledge our ancestral knowledges in order to correct the distorted images, identities and histories of African peoples” (p. 283). The history of Ixim Ulew also needs to be contested and reconstructed through Maya lenses. In this light, I conclude with a review of the unit of analysis for my Indigenous decolonizing theoretical framework: the concept of *Jun Winaq*.

**Concluding Remarks: Theory, Analysis, and Application of the Concept of *Jun Winaq*’**

Through this Chapter, I discuss the theoretical underpinnings that guide this dissertation. I posit throughout that a contribution to the growing scholarship on Indigenous epistemology is the Maya concept of *Jun Winaq*, or the Complete Being, which is central to this dissertation and my Indigenous decolonizing theory. This concept is important both as a theoretical component and a foundational guideline for my research methodology. First, it supports Indigenous metaphors that guide research and theoretical frameworks, such as the sacred hoop (Gunn-Allen, 1992), Nêhiyáw epistemology (Kovach, 2009), the Ceiba (Jiménez Estrada, 2005), and self-in-relation (Graveline, 1998). Second, it validates the holistic and gendered nature of the place-specific, language-based, ceremonial, and spiritual qualities of Indigenous knowledges (Cajete, 1994, 2000, 2010; Brant-Castellano, 2000; Dei, 2008, 2011; Dei, Hall & Rosenberg, 2000; Ermine, 1995; Gunn-Allen, 1992).

Becoming a *Jun Winaq*’ is also related to the process of healing and balancing the negative effects of colonization. In other words, healing is an intrinsic aspect of this process, and it is understood that without it we can never be whole:
Como le mencioné, la parte espiritual es también la cuarta parte del ser humano. Algunos dicen que es la esencia, pero cuando uno habla con las ancianas y los ancianos algunos dicen que no, que la espiritualidad es tan importante como cualquier otra parte del ser humano. Entonces, si no se trabaja esa parte, jamás lograremos ese equilibrio que necesitamos.

As I mentioned, spirituality is the fourth dimension of a human being. Some people say it is the essence [of the self]. But when one speaks to Elders, some of them say that our spiritual self is as important as other parts of the self. Therefore, if we do not focus on [healing] that aspect of the self, then we will never attain the balance that we need. (María Alicia Telón, March 6, 2007)

Further, as already stated, the process of becoming Jun Winaq’ reminds us that all beings possess a female and a male side, just as one can observe in nature. The importance of all sides of creation is evident in Maya languages and explains the equal value assigned to each gender:

Si leemos el Pop Vuh, lo que vemos primero es que siempre está la dualidad. Hablamos del sol/la luna, del día/la noche, de la muerte/la vida. Y en el lenguaje en K’ich’e’, es así: ixoq’/achi, nan/tat, siempre va primero la mujer y por eso yo digo ahora al ver como se habla mucho del género, como se habla del machismo, del feminismo, yo veo que es como una desviación porque si hablamos naturalmente, debe de ser del ser humano y que hay hombre y mujer, pero no entra el conflicto de que esta es más y este es menos. No. Mitad a mitad y que cabalmente como personalidad también, tenemos parte mujer, así como las mujeres tienen parte hombre. Pero como que muchas veces eso se ha dejado por un lado y ya no se desarrolla ese equilibrio entre estas dos partes que tenemos entre el sentimiento y la razón.

When we read the Pop Vuh, what we will first notice is that duality is always present. We speak of the sun/moon, day/night, and death/life. And it is the same in Kich’e’ language, woman/man, grandmother/grandfather, and [you can see] woman is always mentioned first. This is the reason why I say when we now speak [about duality] in terms of gender, sexism, and feminism; it distracts us because if we speak naturally [in Kich’e’] we refer to a human being, understanding the presence of a woman and man. There is no conflict based on valuing one over the other. No. [It is because both are present.] We know that even in our personalities, we possess half female and half male qualities. But,
because today we have forgotten about this [teaching], we no longer seek to balance our feelings and our reason. (José Yac Noj, May 24, 2007)

The above discussion of Jun Winaq’ clarifies the importance of applying it to the contents of a Maya Indigenous education that is inextricably connected to processes of nation building and gender construction. I suggest that, given the holistic nature of the term and its relational quality, it is important to center this concept on many terrains. Mainly, I am interested in how this concept can strengthen the position that Maya women ought not to demand individual rights or yearn to become more like non-Indigenous men. Jun Winaq’ in action is illustrated by Maya women’s conceptualization of the realms of social interaction in contrast to the so-called public and private spheres that inform the content and interpretation of public policy:

Para las mujeres Mayas, no hay distinción entre la esfera pública y privada, tal como se dice en la política. Entendemos que estos conceptos se relacionan a la economía, en donde lo “público” se refiere a las instituciones estatales y lo privado a las empresas privadas. Estos conceptos necesitan un replanteamiento, una discusión y propuesta desde [la perspectiva de] la cultura Maya.

For Maya women, there is no distinction between public and private spheres as you state in the policy. We understand these concepts are related to the economy, whereby “public” alludes to state institutions and “private” to private enterprise. These need to be rethought, discussed and proposed from [the perspective of] Maya culture. (Workshop, Agenda Actualizada de las Mujeres Indígenas, November 09, 2007)

The convergences and divergences between Maya women and the feminist movement in Guatemala lead to, at best, a strategic relationship that presumably opens doors to increase the political and social participation of women overall. At worst, they lead to a replication of the maternalistic relationships that characterize Guatemala and are based on the view of Indigenous women as objects of salvation and protection, as is evident in the language of laws and policies pertaining to women in Guatemala.  

For example, The Civil Code (Código Civil), Paragraph IV, Rights and Responsibilities arising from Marriage, Article 109 declares that men are the sole representatives of the married couple, under Marital Representation’. Article 114 declares men have the power to decide if he allows his wife to work outside of the home. Although these laws changed in 1998 (http://www.socialwatch.org/es/informeImpreso/pdfs/guatemala1999_esp.pdf) after the Interamerican Human Rights Commission (CIDH) received a petition under which it considered Articles109, 110, 113, 114, 115, 131, 133, 255 and 317 discriminatory for women. See http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/cases/S4-00.html
It would be useful to share the knowledge produced in academic contexts in Canada or the United States with Indigenous peoples in Guatemala. This exchange would catalyze discussions on the assumption that there is only one feminist approach to inquiry and theorizing. And it might also lead to a collective analysis of the elements that from Native and Indigenous feminist standpoints could provide the language and tools needed to advance decolonization in regards to gender and other colonial impositions on Indigenous peoples. Finally, following Grande (2004), I once again cite the importance of critically linking issues of gender, pedagogy, and colonialism. This is because “Western concepts of democracy, social justice, and liberation that deny Indigenous knowledge and peoples our uniqueness” (McLaren, as cited in Grande, 2004, 47) abound in academic scholarship. Lomawaima and McCarty (2002) posit that social justice is absent from the Eurocentric notion of democracy. Further, “liberal models of democracy founded upon discourses and practices of social exclusion, have given rise to liberal models of education that are deeply inadequate to the needs of American Indian students” (McLaren, as cited in Grande, 2004, p. 47). Therefore, there is an urgency to rely on Indigenous conceptualizations of democracy that do not ascribe to left- or right-wing politics, but rather are “politically centered in issues of sovereignty, and morally inspired by the deep connections among the Earth, its beings, and the spirit world” (Grande, 2004, p. 35). I agree with Lomawaima and McCarty (2002) when they propose that the values described above are not mere rhetoric but comprise the foundations necessary to attain the ideal of a critical democracy. The \textit{Jun Winaq} is useful in highlighting the tensions and possibilities of democracy as it pertains to the case of Guatemalan education reform in general, and for overcoming gender imbalance in particular.

All of these implications and realities make it imperative to validate Indigenous epistemology as a theoretical framework in which to conduct education research as well as the basis for Indigenous education systems. For Guatemala, this concept is a valuable response to the growing disparities and violence imposed on nondominant bodies and bodies of knowledge. This Chapter served the purpose of engaging Indigenous theoretical standpoints with Western canons to validate it as an academically sound guide for research. I now continue to discuss how this framework also informs the methodology (rationale) behind my research method (process) for this dissertation.
Chapter 4

The Branches (Methodology and Method)

Introduction

Research is inextricably connected to the politics of knowledge production. The theoretical foundations that inform the researcher also guide the process one chooses to follow in creating new knowledge. Thus, when research is done through the lenses of the communities with whom one works, it has the potential to advance the goals and aspirations of its members based on their own conceptualizations of these. This potential stems from the central aim of Indigenous research: to benefit Indigenous peoples, not just researchers (Battiste, 2000a, 2000b; L. T. Smith, 1999, 2005; Weber-Pillwax, 1999; Wilson, 2003, 2008). This dissertation is based upon an Indigenous research methodology derived from my understanding of the protocols and values of Maya culture, as expressed through the metaphor of the Ceiba (Jiménez Estrada, 2005). This metaphor illustrates the values that guide my actions, words and omissions, and accountability to the communities I aim to support. Further, the words I choose connect me to the universe, especially because they have the power to transform and create new realities. This transformation may include how we, as distinct and diverse Indigenous peoples, look at ourselves and at each other through this research, as well as how the likewise diverse Western, non-Indigenous “other” looks at us.

To illustrate the methodology and method for gathering the knowledge that makes up this dissertation, I have divided this section according to the values that I understand come directly from Indigenous Maya knowledge, which is where I am situated. This is best illustrated through a metaphor Maya people use to describe the complex interrelationships that unite all living beings to each other and to the spiritual world: the Ceiba. I will first describe the metaphor and organize my methodology according to its values. I will then describe my motivations for the research and the choice of participants to further elaborate the process. I begin with a discussion on the values found in Maya cosmology that guide the rest of this Chapter.
Values of the Ceiba Inherent in Maya Cosmology

Following an earlier journal piece I wrote about the Ceiba as research methodology (Jiménez Estrada, 2005), this section discusses the values that guide this research: “cooperation, balance, respect, sacredness, truth, thanksgiving” (Jiménez Estrada, 2005, p. 47). To this set, I also add responsibility. These values cut across the different stages of research, and I will show how they guide each step of the process.

In the previous Chapter, I demonstrated the philosophies that inform the theoretical framework (trunk) of this Ceiba. Therefore, I base this research framework on the assumption that researchers have “the task of applying the theoretical and practical underpinnings of their research, and, if successful, these frameworks illustrate ‘the thinking’ behind ‘the doing’” (Kovach 2009, p. 39). The thinking stems from an Indigenous decolonizing framework that centers Indigenous Maya epistemology. This standpoint guides the methods for searching, accessing, analyzing, and disseminating the knowledge shared by the participants. For the purpose of this dissertation, I first discuss the methodology and methods in relation to the specific values delineated above. I then show how these values guided the research at each stage of the game and how they account for slight changes in the focus of the research question: How have Indigenous Maya professionals who have participated in educational reform overcome their struggles within the education system? From this main question others emerge, such as: How has this life experience led them to do the work they do today to build MIE? What have their contributions and aspirations been? What has kept them strong and inspired to continue? Given the gendered nature of Indigenous knowledges, and the emerging theme of balance through the concept of Jun Winaq’ I also address areas that present challenges to the praxis of Indigenous Maya knowledge, such as Indigenous women’s participation and the inclusion of their knowledge in society. Therefore, underlying the research is a strong analysis of the implications of MIE for reconfiguring citizenship and nationhood models. The findings provide fertile ground for discussing the nuances of building community in Guatemala, with Maya communities and individuals due to my role as insider-outsider. Let me begin by summarizing the methodologies this section builds upon.
The Ceiba research methodology builds on the work of other Indigenous scholars such as Russell Bishop (1998, 2003), Linda Tuhiwai-Smith (1999, 2000, 2005, 2008), Marie Battiste (1986, 2000b, 2004), Youngblood Henderson (2000), Cora Weber-Pillwax (1999), Shawn Wilson (2003, 2008), and Margaret Kovach (2009). These Indigenous academics and activists have contributed to the field of qualitative research. Each author has developed Indigenous research methodologies based on their own epistemological positions and specific cultural knowledges and concepts. As a group, their scholarship aims to strengthen the role of Indigenous ways of knowing in research. It is also worthy to note, as Kovach (2009) has, that, “the term epistemology most closely approximates ‘self-in-relation’” (Graveline, 2000, p. 361, as cited in Kovach, 2009, p. 21). In other words, the concept of *self-in-relation* assumes that researcher and participants are connected through place and their respective histories. This relationship creates a web of knowledge that extends beyond the temporality of culturally appropriate, context-based, and local research. For the purpose of this dissertation, and based on Maya understandings of relationships, I use the terms *epistemology* and *cosmology* interchangeably because cosmology is concept most like epistemology from a Maya perspective. In this I follow other Maya scholars (Alvarado & Coz, 2003; Montejo, 2005; Camey Huz et al, 2006).

Setting the terms, protocols, and measures to determine whether research is useful to the communities with whom researchers work exemplifies the goal of Indigenous research: to transcend the colonial legacy that consumes information without using it to advance the goals of the people from whom it is obtained. It is useful to always keep in mind Linda Tuhiwai-Smith’s (1999) warning, “the term ‘research’ is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism” (p. 1). In light of this caveat, a project of Indigenous research, such as this dissertation, must aim to benefit those involved (Battiste, 2000a). This can only be measured by determining whether the research attempts to apply and find ways in which to regain balance through the concept of *Jun Winaq*: does the research bring balance?

The intention of this research is to center the experiences of Indigenous Maya professionals who engage in reclaiming, remembering, and applying Indigenous Maya knowledge to their daily actions. My own understanding of field work includes the privilege and responsibility I have as a researcher to learn from community and local knowledge carriers and engage with community to construct theories based on the information shared, including the
meanings taken and the interpretation of the information. On the flipside, it also means there are implications for bringing Indigenous knowledges into a knowledge economy (Smith, 2005), whereby the academy, governments and corporations can appropriate it and in turn, use it for their own profit and benefit. Walking both lines implies always keeping in mind the dangers of bringing these knowledges into the academy, whereby they can be objects of exploitation. Therefore, my research approach also incorporates the value of cooperation both, in the process of gathering and of creating knowledge. Because of the tensions between sharing for transformation and, inadvertently, for appropriation, I have only shared what the participants agreed is appropriate. But there is another part of research. This aspect involves the goals and aspirations of the community in which the research is based. The community where the research is based is the group of participants themselves. Their links to their own communities and understanding of the danger in sharing sacred knowledge is evident in the generalized information shared regarding foundational philosophical concepts. This is both a limit, as well as strength in terms of safeguarding Indigenous knowledge. I hope to make evident how Indigenous research methodologies provide examples of actions that protect Indigenous knowledge. The Ceiba is an Indigenous research methodology based on the values of reciprocity and respect. These values also inform the following decolonizing research approaches.

First, I want to mention that the contributions of Indigenous scholars to research methodologies are as diverse as their Indigenous cultures, and yet there are some similarities. For example, the Ceiba methodology exemplifies that research must be based on respect, honoring, truth, accountability, and reciprocity. In spite of these commonalities, I do not claim that there is one Indigenous methodology that will cut across cultural and geographical spaces. Indeed, Smith (1999) provides examples of 25 Indigenous methodologies that both, intersect and diverge. Further, as Lavallee (2009) has pointed out, there are also similarities between Indigenous other research frameworks such as participatory action research and critical and feminist research. However, Indigenous research methodologies differ in that they often incorporate spirituality as a valid way of knowing, accessing, and creating knowledge (Cajete, 1994, 2000, 2010; Castellano, 2000; Dei, Hall & Rosenberg, 2000; Ermine, 1995; Graveline, 1998; Gunn-Allen, 1992; Weber-Pillwax, 1999; Wilson, 2003, 2008), something that many Western methodologies shy away from. Indigenous research methodologies make space for spirit to guide the process (Kovach, 2009; L. T. Smith, 1999; Wane, 2006, 2011a, 2011b, Wane & Ritskes, 2011; Weber-
Pillwax, 1999; Wilson, 2003, 2008), to access information Indigenous peoples have by virtue of being, and to transmit it for the benefit of Indigenous communities and balance on earth (L. T. Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2003, 2008). These approaches to conducting research echo the message of the Maya Tzotzil saying that reminds me that my words express what my heart feels (Personal communication, Maya Tzotzil Elder, 2006). And yet, I need to understand the impossibility of fully articulating into words the complex feelings I experienced through this research process. I take the challenge and accept my limitations.

I want to now share some of the personal motives behind my questions, the validity of the research tools and approaches, questions asked, and perspectives on what this specific research intends to do. The motives are an important aspect of research. Chickasaw scholar Eber Hampton (1995) reminds us that:

One thing I want to say about research is that there is a motive. I believe the reason is emotional because we feel. We feel because we are hungry, cold, afraid, brave, loving or hateful. We do what we do for reasons, emotional reasons. That is the engine that drives us. This is the gift of the Creator or life. (p. 52)

As a Maya researcher, stating my motives and the process that led me to the analysis and writing of the dissertation highlights that I cannot remove myself from the research. As an emergent research issue, the researcher–researched relationship is, at best, a slippery slope. This issue is also not exclusive to Indigenous research but permeates all power relationships inherent in the research process. It is through “centering the use of a specific tribal epistemology within an Indigenous research framework [that] our tribal affiliations must be acknowledged” (Kovach, 2009, p. 37). My specific epistemology emerges from my own ancestral relationships in the Mayab’. And, although my research is guided by my understanding of the values in Maya culture, the epistemology or worldview “holds common, enduring beliefs about the world” (Kovach, 2009, p. 37). Kovach (2009) cites Little Bear who points out that, “there is enough similarity among North American Indian philosophies to apply concepts generally” (Little Bear, 2000, as cited in Kovach, p. 37). An Indigenous epistemology thus connects researcher and researched in some respects (as insider), while the experiences, knowledge, and application of our teachings vary depending on our particular journeys (as outsider). It is important to acknowledge situations where the researcher becomes an insider by virtue of her or his tribal affiliation while simultaneously acting as an outsider given the knowledge–power nexus enacted
in the act of research. Therefore, this complex relationship to the research, participants, and context makes research a messy terrain where neutrality is not possible because we of necessity take a political stand by making the choices that researchers make.

While the academy may ask researchers to be neutral and objective, this is virtually impossible because as human beings, we cannot turn our feelings off. Therefore, as researchers it is important to balance these emotions when conducting research. A way I approached this limit of research is through establishing physical, emotional, and spiritual connections to it. To follow up, I further explain how the methodology affected the approach, relationship building, and analysis of the events, moments, and stories I witnessed and the participants had the confidence to share with me. Finally I end with a section on the limits and challenges encountered during this process, explaining what happened and how these elements also affected my own engagement with the information shared by the participants.

The Research Question and Underlying Assumptions

As stated above, this research methodology is based on my understanding of Maya epistemology and is guided by the values of cooperation, balance, respect, sacredness, giving thanks, and truth. The research question for this dissertation developed from a set of assumptions I developed from my location as a Maya woman whose education undervalued Maya culture and knowledge. It assumes that all participants have a strong connection to Maya culture—albeit with varying degrees of engagement and in different ways. It also assumes that the knowledge from our ancestors (Grandmothers and Grandfathers) has kept them going and continues to guide them. For this reason, I chose to interview 20 Maya Indigenous professionals (male and female) that had directly or indirectly participated in the process of education reform after 1996 and who live and work in Guatemala City. I ended up with 17 participants due to a variety of circumstances that I discuss in the limitations and challenges section (p. 29) in this Chapter. Preliminary and secondary research in situ guided my primary interview question: How have Indigenous Maya professionals who have participated in education reform overcome their struggles within the education system? Derived from this main question are others, such as: what were their challenges and what life experiences led them to do the work they do today to build Maya Indigenous Education (MIE)? What have their contributions and aspirations been? What
has kept them strong and inspired to continue? Is Indigenous women’s knowledge included in this process? To what extent and how have they participated? What are the implications of MIE on citizenship and nationhood models? I now turn to a brief description of my own motivations for conducting this research.

**Researcher in relation to research**

I have already stated that I was born on traditional Maya territory in present-day Guatemala City. I grew up believing I had no Indigenous blood and thus, belonged to the *mestizo* group. My father’s grandmother is Indigenous Tzutujil and I believe my paternal grandmother’s side does have Spanish blood. My mother’s side is a mixture of Maya Ach’i and Spanish. Some family members even suggest we might even have French blood and Chinese ancestry. I want to further explain my understanding of why *mestizos* are considered neither Indigenous nor non-Indigenous. This notion stems from the concept of a new “cosmic race” as described by a Mexican philosopher, José Vasconcelos, in 1925 (Vasconcelos & Jaén, 1997). Vasconcelos argued that throughout history, the blending of all four races (categorized by color, in other words the White, Yellow, Black and Red races) gave rise to a fifth race, one that was superior to all other four. This new race is the mixed-race, or the *mestizo*. Vasconcelos believed that this unique race set Latin America apart from any other region of the world. This romanticized view of racial blending however fails to acknowledge that the blending of the races began when colonization brutally imposed its power and racial dominance through rape and pillage, and that, despite this, Indigenous peoples still survive.

My own analysis is not widely accepted in Guatemala due to rigid identity definitions. As stated throughout, in Guatemala a person either holds the identity markers that illustrate she or he grew up with the culture or not. It is a political and social position in the sense that claiming one’s Indigenous identity renders a person to a lower social class as dictated by years of indoctrination into believing Indigenous peoples are seemingly detrimental to “progress” and “development” (see Cojtí, 2005; Blaut, 1989, 1993; Hale, 2004). This is a social pact that has defined the country since the times of liberal reform, when the president Justo Rufino Barrios decided it would be best to regulate Indigenous identity and the land upon which we lived. If I wanted to classify my own experience under these narrow terms, one could say that my family’s
story falls under the label of “assimilated.” My previous acceptance of *mestizo* identity meant an erasure of our Indigenous blood and separation from our Indigenous brothers and sisters. My own reclamation of my Indigenous identity comes from my questioning of where we came from and why we thought we did not have Indigenous blood. It also comes from my attendance at a ceremony with Indigenous peoples in Canada who questioned and challenged me to know who I am in all its complexity. This is how I came to know that my mother’s family’s lineage is from the region of Rabinal, Alta Verapaz. This area is important: our sacred book of creation, the *Pop Vuh*, tells us it is the site of many of the stories that brought us into the present. Nowadays, it is an important cultural center and repository of Maya Indigenous knowledge exemplified by our Maya dances, celebrations, and forms of governance.

As already mentioned, I learned that my paternal great-grandmother belonged to the Maya Tzutujil sociolinguistic group. Finding my direct connection to Maya culture has taught me that my genetic blood knowledge (Holmes, 2000) is alive and expressed through my intuition. Although some elements of Indigenous knowledge come from lived experiences and cultural practices that pass knowledge down through a community (Kirkness, 1998), I continue to connect with my own community and with Indigenous peoples in the North to find similarities and also differences in our way of experiencing and understanding the world. The connections I have made with other Indigenous peoples have created a sense of community based on both, displacement and denial of Indigenous identity but also of decolonization and refusal to accept these definitions. From this point onwards, I could feel, live, and understand that Indigeneity is built upon a set of spiritual, social, and cultural relations with a community. I concur with Calliou (2000) that belonging is determined through a cross-cultural exploration of the concept of community where these relationships are factors. In relation to education, community can be considered a foundational element for First Nations education because the effectiveness of First Nations government is dependent on many variables, including gaining local control of the institutions that impact on Indian lives (Kirkness, 1984). Community and belonging are issues that guide educational processes for Indigenous communities. My challenge now, as I embarked on my field work, was to recreate that community and sense of belonging. Would I stay in Guatemala City or go to my grandmother’s community?
Choosing a geographical context: Guatemala City

In November 2006, I embarked on a journey to understand what other Maya women and men considered to be knowledge from their Grandmothers, including those that are not yet Grandmothers. Would I have the strength to build this research project, even if I were only equipped with a strong calling, one solid contact, and two more potential ones with whom I had only communicated through email? Getting ready for this year of work, I did not think too much about where I would live, how my family and relatives would react and, more important, where this vision would lead me. In the beginning, it led me to visiting the CNEM offices, the place that started my journey of going home to Guatemala to conduct research. To my surprise, I found that the organization and its members were open to exchanging ideas and providing different ways of supporting the work. It also provided a base from which I could learn through observation about the different projects and daily tasks of all involved at the CNEM. More importantly, it led me to deepen my spiritual Maya practice, engage in ceremony, and access traditional places that I believe grounded my vision even if I did not quite understand at the time how I would undertake the journey.

Looking back now, the relationships I built with the staff, and especially the women, connected my Indigenous and gender identity to theirs. I wanted to learn through their stories about the difficulties of being an Indigenous woman in the city, but they were also eager to learn what my own journey as a Maya woman reclaiming her identity and living outside of the Mayab’ was like. This arose from a series of personal interactions in which I often felt I was the subject of research. People wanted to know who I was and what led me to come back home. More important, these exchanges made me realize the political implications of living my Indigenous identity. Colleagues and friends expressed their awe, respect, shock, and puzzlement at my decision. Yet, these very aspects of my identity and personal story that made me an insider-outsider were also the aspects that allowed me entry into formal and informal discussions, invitations to events, and introductions to key experts in Maya education. This is how I began a study full of negotiation, participant observation, and semistructured and in-depth conversations or interviews. The process also provided me with the tools I needed to gather perspectives, reflect upon my observations, and examine the factors that compel Indigenous women and men
to transform the conceptual gaps that exist in the Eurocentric education model currently in place and why they have or have not worked, especially in the context of education reform.

I want to emphasize that a very important aspect of the research addresses the level of participation of Indigenous women at all levels. It is important to note that levels of participation in work-related, community, and family contexts differ, especially for women who have managed to insert themselves into the Maya Movement and other spaces of struggle. To participate and make decisions regarding the contents, concepts, and directions taken to implement education reform, especially in fulfillment of the state’s responsibility to meet the needs of Guatemala’s Indigenous majority, it is important to analyze and understand the diverse dynamics that occur at discursive and “real” levels. This is not to say that men’s voices are not present. Were they not included, I would fall into the trap of only presenting one reality and this would upset the balance in Maya cosmology: the need to respect both sides/genders of the equation. To have balance, one gender and set of knowledge requires its complement.

The participant selection process: Cooperation and giving thanks

My initial contacts and visits to CNEM, ALMG, and the State University of San Carlos allowed me to meet members of organizations working towards the creation and implementation of relevant, bilingual, and intercultural Indigenous education. This type of networking is also called a “respondent-driven snowballing” method (Creswell, 2007). It allowed me to first understand the work of each organization and then to learn about the member organizations and relationships they have with one another. This process permitted me to establish contacts with several organizations until I made the choice of doing further work with a Maya women’s association, Majawil Q’ij, and the main headquarters of CNEM as a strategy to understand their work and also learn about other organizations. Each organization focuses on different aspects of Maya political participation and negotiation with the state. Majawil Q’ij focuses on Indigenous women and part of their strategy is a focus on education. CNEM focuses on education from a holistic standpoint from which the separation of the two genders is not even a topic of discussion. I was interested in learning more about how each organization engaged with, and addressed the issue of Indigenous women’s participation and gender relations in their work. I expected to give some form of offering as is customary in Canada among some Indigenous
groups, however, I learned that even the smallest gestures of reciprocity, such as volunteering some time, seemed to suffice for fulfilling the protocol of giving thanks for the knowledge and space shared with me during this time.

As expected (and now I understand why), my relationship with Majawil Q’ij opened up an entirely different research focus to consider: the political participation of Indigenous women. This is an important aspect of this research because, on all levels, the Indigenous Maya Movement is engaging with the state in negotiations to ensure that the Peace Accords and the Accord on Identity and the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (AIDIPI in Spanish) are met. Both organizations focus their energies on making spaces for the active participation and the validation of Indigenous peoples’ voices in the making of policies that will improve their lives in Guatemala. Moreover, the leaders at Majawil Q’ij also seek to understand and share with others the complexity and limitations of engaging in a complex relationship with the state. Recognizing the limits of negotiation with the state apparatus is, as I was told, part of a process that will, in the end, work from Indigenous peoples’ perspectives.

As I analyze my decision to address the contribution of Indigenous women from both positions, I felt that I had to find a way to discuss the challenges Indigenous women still experience in dealing with the state, with non-Indigenous organizations, and also within Indigenous organizations. The result was a change of focus and a different way to address my original. Based on my discussions with several key informants, I opted to focus more on the research methodology and thus focus on the personal stories of all the participants about their personal experiences with education. This would then address the question of how Indigenous Maya knowledge is reclaimed, remembered, and lived and/or negotiated in their daily lives. It also would shed light on the importance of remembering the important concept of duality and balance that is an intrinsic part of Maya Indigenous knowledge and epistemology, understanding the existence of a gap between theory and practice.

Balance and MIE in relation to Indigenous women

Mainstream education can no longer ignore the demands Indigenous women are making regarding their inclusion and significant participation in culture and politics. This demand for
inclusion is the demand active participation in co-constructing the path each distinct Indigenous nation will take. As reclamation of culturally grounded forms of organization and governance, a decolonized approach to equality is based on our understanding that Maya women and men both have the responsibility to lead our nations (Asociación Maya U’k’Ux Be, 2005). This position has changed in most communities and thus, Indigenous women today still struggle for respect and participation in matters that concern our communities from our perspectives. A point of entry for this research is the imbalance that occurs between the dominant (Western) knowledge system that marginalizes and does not value Indigenous peoples as evidenced in the relationship between the imperial and colonizing views in Orientalist discourse, critiqued by postcolonial scholars such as Said (1978) and Indigenous knowledges. In another vein, there are other similarities between the situation of other Indigenous peoples and present-day social relations in Guatemala, particularly supporting A. Smith’s (2008) proposition that, “in the name of sovereignty and tradition [my emphasis] Native communities often reinscribe a heteropatriarchal neocolonial agenda friendly to the interest of … empire” (A. Smith, 2008, p. 246). The interview questions were designed to elicit the participants’ views on this topic, given my own experience and observations of the imbalances in the way Indigenous women and men relate to each other as a result of the upholding of colonial values. How do these contradictions limit or further women’s roles and level of participation? There are many contradictions between the ideals of Maya culture and its practices. In response, in order to have balance in the research, it became crucial that both Indigenous women and men participate in the discussions. I had anticipated that only women would speak, but this, I was reminded, would only create more imbalances.

My underlying assumption for the research is the need to bridge the reality and ideals of gender relationships within institutions and within interpersonal relationships. Moreover, as I became more engaged in participation in different events and organizations, my involvement in everyday life during a year of continuous support in two spaces (CNEM and Majawil Q’ij) became more pressing. Connecting these interactions with the efforts to pursue educational agendas that benefit Indigenous women and men, as well as girls and boys, demanded keen observation, interpretation, inquiry, and finally the concise discussions developed through the in-depth interviews. It is not enough to question, as Cumes (2004) does, whether “intercultural dialogues” and prevalent models of multiculturalism are adequate to the accommodation of diversity and transcendence of racism and discrimination against Indigenous peoples. We also
have to ask about the prevention of discrimination against Indigenous women and girls. Myrna Cunningham (2006) adds that racism and sexism, both byproducts of colonialism, continue to marginalize and exclude Indigenous women and their knowledge from decision-making processes in both the public and private spheres. The challenge this poses makes it imperative to transform how we understand the project of sovereignty, self-determination, and healing. This is a necessity given that colonization is a gendered process and, likewise, so is decolonization.

Part of the research methodology and questions precisely sought to analyze the discrepancies between everyday actions and Maya traditional knowledge, which privileges women as “decision-makers, bearers of life and keepers of culture and knowledge” (Warren, 1998, p. 108). Tensions mount when heteropatriarchy (Smith, 2008) naturalizes social hierarchy. This hierarchy maintains colonial power relations that diminish Indigenous women’s status and decision-making power. My decision to inquire about gender relations came at the expense of having to defend a position that is not explicitly feminist but one that seeks balance. In the end, many people still viewed my position as feminist although I never claimed such. This perception positioned me within the circles of Indigenous women who ascribe to feminism. The reality also drove me to circles where Indigenous women refuse feminism. The complexity of the issue also closed doors to a number of purists who saw my research as invalid because I had not lived on Maya territory for a long time and because of my Western schooling and upbringing, which could bring to bear “a cultural orientation, a set of values, a different conceptualization of such things as time, space and subjectivity, different and competing theories of knowledge, highly specialized forms of language and structures of power” (L. T. Smith, 1999, p. 42). These tensions further nuance the analysis in the sense that they bring into question the knowledge that I bring onto the field by virtue of my Western schooling. They lead to deep questions about whose ideals, goals, concepts, and theories drive my research.

The perception I had of myself as an insider/outsider was overcome with time and action. The only way to prove to participants and others that would later accept me as part of their community that I was not an outsider was through my actions. I decided that as part of my reciprocity not only to the participants but also to Maya peoples in general, I had to give back. This is where volunteer work, which is part of our ethic of care, to support each other when possible with our gifts, was important for creating trust.
Reciprocity as part of a learning, observing, and creating community

As a researcher who has the advantage of occupying positions on both the inside (by virtue of my birth place and identity as Maya Indigenous woman) and the outside (by virtue of where I currently live and my mixed-blood), I determined the importance of relationship building based on trust, reciprocity, and work in the community. These elements became central to understand the complex realities lived by professional Indigenous women and men and situate Indigenous women’s experiences of oppression within their own framework viewed through their own interpretive lens (Denetdale, 2006; Mihesuah, 1998, 2004). This particular approach also benefited me as a researcher trying to locate the activities these community leaders and professionals engage in within the communities where they conduct their work. It is hard to say whether the participants and the communities I visited through this research benefited or the reverse. I believe that we mutually benefited from the work we all engaged in, precisely because of the responses I received during the field work, when I sent translated summaries of the research and findings and also, through the translated version of the Ceiba methodology article. I also recall my own fear of producing work that would not benefit them in their struggles. I remember the words of a community leader during a workshop held at one of the communities associated with Majawil Q’ij. She commented on the problems that Indigenous women face in their own communities and how the advocacy and education work of Majawil Q’ij strengthens their own work and conviction to fight for Indigenous women’s rights:

Lo que aprendemos aquí, lo compartimos con nuestras comunidades. A lo mejor no nos dan un sueldo para hacer esto pero lo hacemos porque nuestro sueño es que algo bueno salga de todo esto. Las autoridades locales no nos toman en cuenta y no cumplen sus promesas. Pero nosotras podemos compartir lo que aprendemos en los talleres con las compañeras porque ellas no saben que tienen derechos y sus esposos no reconocen que nuestro trabajo tiene valor. Pero ahora sabemos que es nuestro derecho participar entonces salimos para poder hacer lo que podamos para nuestras comunidades.

We can now share what we learn here with our communities. We may not receive a salary for doing this, but we are willing to share the information with our communities and we hope that through this, something positive results. The local authorities do not take us into account and they do not deliver on their promises.
We can share what we learn at the workshops with other women because they still do not recognize they have rights. And their husbands do not recognize the value of this. But now that we know it is our right to participate, we do what we can to help our communities that way. (Community leader #1, Workshop proceedings, December 2007)

As a researcher, I recognize the realities Maya women and men face in rural areas, particularly in participating in projects that offer training in areas that promise to improve their social and economic situation. Further, the above quote reminds me of the hope Indigenous women have. This hope is that sharing their knowledge will strengthen theirs and other women’s Maya identity. This strengthening has proven effective in some communities, particularly as strategies to denounce gender and state violence. The following quote also demonstrates their desire to organize in order to document and provide evidence of the effectiveness of their work. Of course, it illustrates the exclusions Indigenous women’s organizations face if their membership does not include men. But it alludes to building strategic alliances between Indigenous women and men in order to improve the lives of Indigenous communities in general:

El problema que enfrentamos [en nuestra comunidad] es que tenemos un grupo de mujeres pero no sabemos si en realidad hemos avanzado en algo. Pero ahora, luego de organizarnos para tratar los problemas que nos afectan en nuestra comunidad, pues ya tenemos un consejo que nos permite seguir luchando por nuestro derecho de tener la palabra y pedirle al gobierno lo que nos hace falta. Nos hace falta el recurso económico para tener lo básico pero aun así, nos reunimos con las otras mujeres aunque las autoridades no nos toman en cuenta. Nos ignoran. Y el gobernador no nos atiende cuando queremos hablar sobre la escasez de agua y de la salud. Por ejemplo, le exigimos que nos facilitara un proyecto de drenaje liderado por las mujeres y nos dijo que no aceptaría un proyecto liderado por las mujeres. Entonces tuvimos que pedir a nuestros compañeros organizados que nos apoyaran. Y así fue que a través de sus voces y del apoyo de un grupo de derechos humanos que finalmente nos escucharon. Y ahora les damos gracias por la oportunidad de salir y apoyar a otros grupos de mujeres que están haciendo proyectos similares en otras comunidades.
The problem we face in [our community] is that we have a women’s group, but we do not know if we have accomplished anything. But now, after organizing around the issues that affect us in our community, we constituted a council where we continue to advocate for our right to speak and also ask for what we need from the government. We lack economic resources to meet our needs and so we organize ourselves with the women in the community but the authorities do not take us into account. They ignore us. And the governor of the region refuses to speak to us when we try to bring our issues about our lack of water and health to him. For example, we demanded a water drainage project led by the women, and the governor said he would not accept a project led by women. So we had to ask some of our male comrades, who are also organized, to back us up. It was only through their voice, and also through the advocacy work of a human rights group, that our voices were heard. And now, we are thankful to have the project and also a group of women that has attended the training workshops in order to go and support similar work in other communities. (Community leader #2, Workshop proceedings, December 2007)

These words reminded me every day that my work has to benefit the communities in order for it to have some meaning to the women who struggle every day in their desire to participate like our Grandmothers did. To this effect, I decided to also review some policy documents in order to understand what the dominant “other” and the allies of the Maya peoples wrote about. This process grounded my understanding of national and state policies about Indigenous peoples and our place within the narrative and value system espoused by the nation-state. It also provided evidence of my responsibility to increase access of my research to the communities through future translations into the Spanish and Mayan languages.

Secondary Literature Review and Policy Documents in situ

During my first few months living in Guatemala, it became clear that I needed to learn more about the context and history of the issues of education and of Maya demands. I needed to learn more about the national and international policies that were facilitating and those that were preventing the construction and implementation of a Maya Indigenous education system. After having spent a month or so with the CNEM and Majawil Q’ij, it became clear that I also needed to visit the social research centers where knowledge is produced. This knowledge pertains to the social and power relations that determine the negotiation of Indigenous education. First, I
decided to visit the Latin American Faculty for Social Studies (FLACSO in Spanish) and the Association for the Advancement of Social Sciences (AVANCSO in Spanish). These are two important research centers and think tanks in the social sciences in Guatemala. These institutions are the knowledge repositories where most scholars, students, and policy makers develop their analyses. This stage allowed me to conduct another literature review and learn about previous efforts to put education reform into practice. It also led me to reflect on the challenges I could expect from having proposed such a huge research question, and the limits set by asking it with such a limited scope and limited number of participants. And the need I saw to engage with communities to decide on key terms and what was needed for MIE to be effective.

The reflections and the recommendations from the people who guided me in this research project and from key members of the CNEM allowed me to accept that my research would only be useful if I focused more closely on the challenges that prevent the implementation and further development of MIE in Guatemala. The challenges for attaining quality and relevant education not only implicate a slew of government policies and institutions, they also include a combination of salient yet subtle socioeconomic and political factors resulting from the country’s acceptance of Euro-Anglo values, systems of classification, and representations as evidence of democracy and peace.

Conversations and Involvement to Identify Participants

The participants chosen for this study also chose the study: there is a general consensus that discussions about Indigenous education, and specifically Maya education based on Maya cultural values, epistemologies, and ontologies, require a rupture regarding the institutional characteristics of a professional in Guatemala as the only way to legitimize their experts status (a degree or schooling beyond high school) and the professionals who have wisdom, knowledge, and credentials gained through life experience and traditional ways of teaching and learning (Workshop, January 30, 2008). Further, the value of sharing participant stories as valid and legitimate theorizing stems from an analysis of the elements proposed in Indigenous education: language, experience, wisdom, knowledge, community leadership, and respect. This brings to light the different value system involved in granting epistemological, theoretical, and political authority solely to professionals who have earned high school diplomas or higher.
The selection process was a bit cumbersome. Some participants were easily identified while others were not. This is related not only to the dearth of professionals combining the fields of education with gender, but also the fact that not many researchers and professionals work from Indigenous perspectives. Also, I became aware that discussing Indigenous women’s knowledge and participation in the education reform process opened up scrutiny of my approach and authenticity: Was I addressing Maya Indigenous education and Indigenous women’s knowledge from a feminist perspective? If so, some participants, especially the male participants, became skeptical. Therefore, it became evident that including Maya men’s voices and perspectives was crucial in order to get a more comprehensive look at the construction of gender from both male and female Indigenous perspectives. With these considerations in mind, I proceeded to engage in fruitful debates with prospective participants regarding Maya women’s and men’s own participation and motivation for engaging in diverse processes to construct Maya Indigenous education (MIE).

The CNEM assisted in this process through their support staff and, to some extent, through the guidance of their 2007 Director (Ajpop’ in Maya K’ich’e, or Cargador Principal in Spanish) Edgar Emilio Choguaj. However, due to the complex nature of the political and ideological affinities that unite and at times divide the Maya Movement, only the people they considered to be their allies were suggested. The work to identify and gather the contact information for others who worked directly or indirectly with CNEM proved to be a long process since the time I spent at their office (December 2006 – April 2007) was mostly focused on doing literature reviews, helping with administrative work, and doing participant observations. I must also add that I distributed information about the research and held a meeting with the staff at CNEM in order to solicit participants. However, few accepted the invitation to participate and only two people actually agreed to continue with the study. This period, however, also helped me tweak the observations regarding the politics of gender, class, and perceived social status within the organization and within some of the affiliated member organizations. This analysis is included in the section pertaining to the political and social context of Indigenous professionals and organizations.

I embarked on a process of conducting informal conversations with and observations of potential participants. After recruiting the participants, I provided them with a version of my
research question translated into Spanish, a summary of the research, and the questions we would discuss. Eventually, after making appointments to meet with them at their earliest convenience, we began our in-depth conversations based on the set of questions I had provided earlier. Unlike the Indigenous cultural protocol in Canada that called for the giving of tobacco to the participants in exchange for sharing their knowledge, our exchange did not include any offering other than my word that I would support their work in any way I could. I was told that protocol would be different had I approached Elders in Maya communities. Mainly, the participants reported, rather than the scheduling of interviews, meeting with an Elder would require gaining trust through a trusted community member, who would then introduce me to the Elder, and eventually we could discuss what we felt was appropriate. This process could take several hours or several days, and be conducted through family visits or through ceremony. Remembering these words prepares me for my future research, for which I must possess at least basic proficiency in a Maya language. But even for the current research, understanding that much is lost in translation, I decided to ask close friends and colleagues for Maya language instructional materials that would help me learn independently. A colleague facilitated my acquisition of an audio set and visual workbooks to help me learn Kich’e’. Through these and the daily efforts all participants and friends made to only speak to me in Kich’e’, Kaqchik’el, or Tzutujil, I began the process of understanding a bit more about the nuances and meanings found in the language itself. These meanings are conveyed through the participants’ stories. In the next section I explain the basis for converting these stories into meaningful “data.”

**Data Analysis: Stories as Meaning**

Margaret Kovach (2009) states that, “stories remind us of who we are and of our belonging. … In considering story as both methods and meaning, it is present as a culturally nuanced way of knowing” (p. 94). Participants’ stories share knowledge of what they consider to be true based on their experience, and illustrate positive ways in which barriers are overcome by Indigenous peoples in the 21st century. The epistemological function of stories is also as an "intergenerational knowledge transfer" (Cruikshank, 1998, as cited in Kovach, 2009, p. 95). Therefore, as a method of learning and acquiring information, storytelling is also an intrinsic part of Indigenous methodology because of the knowledge stories hold and the lessons they provide.
for younger generations. Throughout this dissertation, the stories told by the participants illustrate a complex system of different ways of valuing and evaluating knowledge, not only that which is gained in schools but also that which is learned through the everyday practice of traditional knowledge and wisdom.

Stories also have limitations, for they do not profess a universal truth and bring on more questions. A caveat to remember is that the positions each participant holds based on their gender, community leadership role, and age also complicate the analysis, making the interpretation of their stories and my own observations more complex. Also, my own experiences and biases as a researcher further complicate the process of making meaning. For this stage, as an Indigenous researcher upholding the values of honor, respect, and truth, I made the conscious choice to make meaning based on what I initially understood in the time and place of the story, and then gather the stories and summarize them to further understand the themes that cut across the different conversations held with my participants. This process proved enriching and exciting, and it allowed me to develop a thematic map with 13 themes:

- the increasing political participation of women within Maya organizations and the state;
- the dangers and possibilities of Indigenous groups negotiating with the state;
- maintaining and promoting Indigenous identity through schooling;
- the role of ceremony and traditional leadership in the balancing of relations and energy between women and men;
- creating different citizenships to center spirituality;
- decolonizing education through ceremony;
- Indigenous feminisms and the notion of being Westernized;
- re-centering Grandmother’s knowledge in education;
- the co-optation of Indigenous education through intercultural and multicultural education;
- characteristics of Indigenous education;
- challenges to access and quality of education in Guatemala;
- challenges of building a Maya Indigenous education system;
- remembering art forms and symbols that teach about balance and complementarity.
The themes aforementioned illustrate the diversity of subjects the participants find meaningful. The choice to focus on three areas was a personal choice based on the participants’ input about the salient issues that need addressing and also, based on my understanding as an insider/outsider of the issues that are also being discussed in Indigenous Studies outside of Guatemala. Further, I found that, given my own expertise and training, I could only deal with certain topics fully enough to make a contribution to the field. My judgment reflects the complexity of working across different the perspectives and goals arising from the research. Some participants had a vision of how this research could enhance their own work, while others did not believe it would make much difference (Workshop, January 30, 2008). This lack of confidence in the value of academic research illustrates a history of Western research in Guatemala as an endeavor that only makes contributions to the field of study to which the researcher belongs without having any real benefit for the communities involved. Because this colonizing style of research is ongoing, the participants at times demonstrated their skepticism during our conversations.

The uncertainty that my research would facilitate any transformation of education reform, and even less so of Indigenous education became clear through the pauses, facial expressions, and emphasis that accompanied the participants’ responses to certain questions. This apparent lack of confidence that my research could make a contribution to the work of the participants, however, provided dynamism to the conversations as I navigated the script in ways that would accommodate the participants’ interest in the research. I found that almost all of the people I spoke to put a great deal of time and detail into the telling of their life stories. Mainly, they focused on how they overcame the challenges they encountered in educational settings. I further asked them to illustrate the various ways in which they now work to transform education so that future generations do not face the same barriers. I took notes and digitally recorded the conversations for later transcription. I also went home after each conversation and wrote in my journal in order to capture my feelings during the process, what I learned, and how this shaped my research.

Once the participants became more comfortable with me through our informal interactions, it became easier to explain my role and goals as a researcher and the objectives of the study. I then scheduled the in-depth interviews only after I and the participants felt we had
built some trust. For this phase, many professionals who could not set time aside from their daily work activities asked if I could meet them in their hometowns. For many of these interviews, I traveled to remote communities, at times only to find that the participant had changed her or his mind and/or that the time was not right. Of some 10 trips I took, only three were successful.

The questions that guided the interviews are included in Appendix A. As stated already, these questions were the initial questions proposed for the study with the specific purpose of gaining ethics review approval. These questions continued to guide the process. However, I wanted the process to also value current efforts in Indigenous education already happening in Guatemala. Therefore, the questions had to be reworked in order to acknowledge the participants’ realities and answers. For example, when the participant had directly contributed to the construction of the MPER or to discussions between the state and communities, the questions were adjusted to her or his particular role, place, and space of participation. For participants who were not directly involved, I probed into their work to examine how it indirectly contributed to the creation and implementation of Indigenous education. Appendix B includes the script that I tried to follow during the interviews I held with the participants.

The questions and leading statements used were also translated into Spanish and then rephrased to make them more conducive to the creation of trust and rapport. Through the use of these tools, the conversations became semistructured interviews. As a researcher that respects the co-creation of knowledge, I relied on the participants’ understandings of the questions. I also honored their desire to delve deeper into a topic or relate it to issues they felt comfortable discussing.

Through discussions with the potential participants, it became clear that not all had directly engaged in the process of educational reform. I also came to the realization that the MPER is a proposal that consists mainly of the recommendations developed by the CNEM in consultation with their membership and that does not necessarily reflect the views of other organizations that do not focus exclusively on education or on education in negotiation with the state. As well, most of the people focused on their life stories and, as a researcher, I saw this as an opportunity to discuss what part of their story prompted them to continue working for an education system that might one day be inclusive of Maya Indigenous peoples and knowledge. It
was also an opportunity to discuss the possibility that one day we might even have our own system of education, or Maya Indigenous Education (MIE). The questions asked were met with the unanimous recommendation that the concepts and knowledge that need to be included in the curriculum need to come from the communities themselves and from the Elders as voiced by Edgar Choguaj, Domingo López, María Morales, José María Tol, Rómulo Cuj, Pedro Us, and Virginia Ajxup. Therefore, I decided to analyze the data based on the recurring theme of challenges posed to creating an education system and the possibility of having ancestral knowledge, from both Grandmothers and Grandfathers, as central to overcoming these challenges and providing hope. On other words, the research focuses on the elements that make possible a Maya Indigenous education. These elements also provide the tools with which to turn challenges into opportunities. Therefore, the elements that inform this education system are at the base of the model, or the roots of the Ceiba. These values and knowledge provide the foundational elements of the process of becoming Jun Winaq, and affect several areas. For the purpose of this dissertation, I chose three areas where MIE has an effect: ancestral knowledge as applied to gender constructions in education; the sacred lunar Maya calendar as a cultural pedagogical tool and knowledge base in education; and the creation of citizens that center Creator and spirituality in order to attain self-determination.

**Negotiating meaning**

Making meaning or interpreting the knowledge shared during the interviews and conversations involved many layers. For this dissertation, it involved not only transcribing the interviews recorded but also contextualizing the information received through verification of dates and other historical data shared during the conversations. For the participants as well, it involved translation of key concepts from their own languages into Spanish during the conversations we had. Moreover, I had to go back to my own journal to add more detailed descriptions derived from my own observations and perspectives based on that particular moment in my life and in the context of the research. I transcribed some interviews in the evening following the January workshop. In some cases, I took notes or even transcribed one interview as I held conversations with the rest of the participants, allowing me to hone the questions and look for points of entry into particular topics. The latter conversations were a bit
more relaxed on my part since I had become more confident and comfortable with the process. I also felt more at ease with the participants as I had encountered them on many occasions and had even developed quasi-working relationships by virtue of my affiliation with the CNEM and Majawil Q’ij. After all of these steps, there was also the task of translating the information into English, as everything was in Spanish. I cannot say that nothing was lost in translation because that would not take into account the difficulty of translating a worldview twice, first from a Maya language to Spanish, and then from Spanish into English. Thus, I recognize that my humble beginnings in analyzing and making meaning had many limitations which I addressed through negotiating meaning with the participants.

**Deciding on themes to discuss**

Throughout the process of finding the participants and during the conversations held with potential participants, I advised the potential participants how the information would be used and what participation I envisioned from them. I proceeded to send an information package, along with a consent form prior to the informal meetings and final interview. After the interviews took place, the participants all received their transcriptions 1 month to 6 months after the interviews took place. The methodology proposed described a linear trajectory to the research process and, simply put, it did not happen this way. During the interview stage, and even through the data analysis and writing process, the participants remain engaged by providing feedback on my interpretation of the data. This allows the participants more ownership over the process and also over the knowledge produced. Therefore, all participants continued to have the opportunity to withdraw from the study and/or modify what they said up until the final writing stage.

Having based my research on Indigenous knowledge concepts, I understood that the information gained is embedded in a particular context, space and time. This particularity suggests a difference from Western conceptualizations of “reality” and data interpretation. An initial effort to understand Maya concepts, terminology and stories of the participants led to the conclusion that I needed to hold a workshop where I could present the initial analyses and findings to the participants. This workshop took place on January 30, 2008, and although it did not have the attendance I expected, 8 participants actively shared their expert opinions and provided me with feedback on the data collected and its interpretation. It also provided a forum
for those who felt comfortable with disclosing their identity as participants to share and dialogue amongst themselves.

The conversations between the participants and I during the focus group or workshop provided an opportunity to review some of the key concepts I address in this dissertation. This discussion fostered debate and the sharing of various perceptions about the need to understand and transmit a unified version of what key terms, such as gender, various modalities of education, citizenship, and traditional roles, mean. It also allowed for a discussion on which key elements are necessary to continue research to strengthen the Indigenous position with the goal of creating a distinct and autonomous education system. In this view, reform also has a place, but it has different implications for Indigenous contexts than it does for non-Indigenous contexts. It was agreed that I would decide which themes best fit my own understanding of where educational reform in general, and Indigenous education specifically, need further work. Taking this cue as an opportunity to deepen my own understanding of the issues, the selection of the themes in this dissertation is therefore my contribution as an insider/outside or outsider/insider to provide a removed yet invested observation and analysis of my own contribution to validating and valuing Indigenous knowledge in education.

The organizing phase for the workshop involved an enormous amount of time and space. I also had to negotiate the text and meaning with the participants during the activity and over several months prior to the meeting. As stated above, I sent the interview transcripts to the participants to give them an opportunity to review their words and change or delete anything they did not feel comfortable sharing. In addition, they received a list of the themes that arose throughout the data to indicate my direction. During the workshop I also discussed the possible structure of the dissertation through a brief presentation. We held a long discussion on their thoughts about the possible contributions to their own work as well as some possible effects on educational policy. After a fruitful exchange of perspectives, they advised me that my work may not have much impact, but it might illustrate what researchers and educators need to do in order to include concepts from our Maya culture in the curriculum. For example, Cleotilde Vásquez and José Yac Noj suggested the need to conduct more research with Elders in different communities to come up with a concept that embodies the goals of gender balance (Workshop, January 30, 2008). The debate focused on the need to agree on key concepts to use in education
based on the recommendations of Elders. The participants also guided the direction of this dissertation by pointing out that much has been written about educational reform but very little about the philosophy that informs Maya education (Daniel Domingo, Workshop, January 30, 2008).

The participants’ positions as professionals in the realms of education, politics, and community organizing did not necessarily mean that they were willing to propose new ideas or create new perspectives. Negotiation at all levels became crucial and many participants, although willing to share their experiences, were reluctant to go further. But they suggest that this work needs to go further. For example, they recommended more research take place in order to gather from communities, and especially the Elders, the meaning and concepts they see fit to use in education. The cooperation of the participants during the research that led them to reflect on the research itself is important because it brought into the study different lenses that I might not have considered given my academic training and personal story. Therefore, the workshop allowed me a place to facilitate the merging of these perspectives with my own and thus reflect the nuances present at all times, not only in the context of the current research of proposals for future work.

In addition, after speaking to the participants on numerous occasions via telephone or email, I found it necessary to hold a day-long workshop with all of the participants who wanted their names to appear in the final document. This workshop aimed to not only inform the participants about the direction of the dissertation, it also provided an opportunity to meet and get feedback on how I was approaching the information. At the time my ethics review was coming up for renewal, and I wanted to do this prior to its expiry. I had been so entirely focused on the process of sharing, transcribing, and analyzing the words of the participants that I lost sight of the realities of working in a Western research institution. I had to renew my ethics review before the beginning of February. It took a long time to arrange this workshop/talking circle. The participants informed me that their agendas were already full with meetings and deadlines because the new government would commence its fiscal period at the beginning of February. Therefore, given the political climate due to the recent September 2007 elections and the second round of elections that ensued in November, the situation was pressing. The tension was created by the fact that the winning political party was a strong supporter of Indigenous issues and peoples. The opposition, led by a former military general rumored to have led many
massacres against Indigenous and rural populations in the 1980s, created tension in the country amongst all the sectors. This political juncture, along with end of the 2007 fiscal year, kept the participants busy with end of year financial and narrative reports. It also meant an end to their jobs, especially those working in the government sector. I continued to analyze information and gather points that needed further development in order to propose future steps for further study and praxis. Finally, 12 participants agreed to come to a workshop on January 30, 2008, although only 8 attended.

After the workshop concluded, I felt that I had to reflect on all of the recommendations. I attended ceremonies and continued to work/volunteer for the organizations that supported my research. Eventually, because I became heavily involved in a regional project working with Indigenous women in Chiapas and Guatemala through Majawil Q’ij, along with my maternity leave, I temporarily lost contact with the participants, who had asked me to send the translated dissertation to them. I continued to keep contact through email and telephone, to let them know how the work was progressing. I meant to send them the key aspects of the dissertation with my analysis but because time was limited and it was taking me a long time to write in both English and Spanish, I decided to focus on writing the dissertation. However, I am in the process of translating the dissertation to make it available to them. I believe this will allow us to continue dialogues about the knowledge produced, if they choose to do so.

Limitations and Challenges

From the day I arrived in Guatemala, the prospect of having “come home” overwhelmed me. I was excited and also reluctant to test whether all I had planned to do would come to fruition. Would people accept and trust me? What would the outcome be if they did not? Could I trust that what they do, say, and propose would fit my own goals? Would my goals be congruent with theirs? How would I reconcile differences in goals, aspirations, and interpretations?

Looking at my research notes, I recall that I was scared because I did not know where this process would lead. The primary research that I had conducted from Canada provided the means to make a thesis proposal, and yet, I still needed to establish relationships with the people with whom I would conduct the research. I proceeded to attend public events and closed meetings at
the organizations with which I became involved in order to identify potential participants. After an initial contact meeting and running into many of the same people at various events, I set a schedule with potential participants so I could visit them in different contexts. I continued to attend public and private events, and also arranged meeting times for informal conversations and in-depth interviews. This strategy to establish trust, to show who I am and what my goals are, to learn about the context, the organizations, and the people themselves worked for a time. However, after awhile, it became clear that people began to question my presence and why I had to take this long to become familiar with the realities of living and experiencing life in Guatemala City. Did I come here to do volunteer work as well? Could I help out with a few tasks?

Some of the challenges involved in conducting the research stemmed from the divisions that exist between and within the Maya Movement. These issues pertain to the racialization of Indigenous peoples by non-Indigenous peoples and also the imbalance between Indigenous women and men. Another challenge faced daily was maintaining personal safety which required taking measures to avoid dangerous situations given the high crime rate in the city. To deal with this situation, I resorted to hiring a taxi driver by the month, which proved to be a costly luxury that reinforced the class division between me and my colleagues and friends. To try to breach the gap, I decided to share my resources as best I could. I would ask if anyone wanted to share the ride. Although this strategy seems superficial, it helped to lessen the tension this economic difference brought into the relationships I built in Guatemala. The tension is a result of the reality of the poor socioeconomic situation at the time coupled with high inflation rates that increased the cost of living, especially for people in the city. Further, because I received an award to conduct field research from the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), I had to get receipts for all expenses. In order to obtain receipts, I purchased food and other items from big chain restaurants and supermarkets that were relatively expensive, which created a further divide between me and colleagues who did not have this luxury. As a result, I believe my class and privilege resulting from my having come as a university researcher with a grant came into play by creating a divide between the participants and me.

After praying for the wisdom to handle this situation and visiting a sacred site, I engaged in another strategy to overcome this divide. I tried my best to connect with my colleagues on
different levels, for example, by sharing the history of my maternal grandmother and analyzing the colonial relations that led her to flee the countryside and eventually forced her to leave her traditional dress and language behind. This part of my personal history seemed to affect the understanding some participants and other Maya peoples had of me. It seemed to justify, to some extent, my lack of knowledge of the culture and simultaneously emphasize my efforts to live my Indigenous identity and work for the benefit of Indigenous peoples in general.

Finally, I must reiterate that there is a gap in knowledge creation when the participants’ first language is a Maya language and the researcher only speaks Spanish and English. This makes it challenging to discern the richness and complexities of the knowledge shared, and thus, although negotiation took place, many of the concepts shared still fall short of their original meanings when rendered in English. Research involving a population of a different language than myself thus posed limitations in that I might have missed the full meaning of the knowledge shared.

**Gendered and racialized roles in the research process**

I began to notice that my status as outsider/insider also meant I was expected to fill roles that most researchers from dominant backgrounds and races are not. The gendered and racialized position of another Indigenous woman in the office implied another body was available to make coffee and snacks, photocopy, take minutes, and answer phones. Feeling uncomfortable that the role I was expected to fill as an Indigenous woman was a gendered stereotype of Indigenous women as servants, it became urgent to make my position clear. I was there to conduct research and co-create knowledge and participate in whatever is necessary to that task, not only to serve coffee and take notes. But I decided to accede to see where this gendered and racialized position would take me. In no time at all, my status transformed from researcher and academic into volunteer, administrative assistant and extra hand. This went on for a while until I decided that my contributions to this particular organization would not go beyond making and serving coffee and taking notes unless I insisted. Therefore, I spoke to the director and we agreed that my work could assist their work, for which I was asked to attend meetings to plan different aspects of an important event for all organizations doing Maya education: The IV National Congress for Maya Education. I had to put my own work aside for about three months in order to attend to this
important moment, but I continued to engage in informal conversations with people that I had already identified as participants and some that I had done semistructured interviews with. I did manage to work on my transcription during this time, and send some back to the participants involved in order for them to see where the research was headed and to review their transcripts to see if there was anything they wanted to omit. This phase granted me the opportunity to participate in and also become an observer of Indigenous and non-Indigenous social relations and also relations between Indigenous women and men.

The entire research process became a series of negotiated times and places, spaces where both researcher and participant felt safe and at ease, and times did not come into conflict with other engagements. I had to set a schedule as well to go back to the participants and ensure that they agreed with my interpretation of their experiences and knowledge. In particular, what became a challenge in writing the dissertation was my own approach to negotiating meaning across three languages. This is because the interviews were conducted in Spanish, and thus, key concepts from Maya languages were translated into Spanish first, and then into English (with attention to how the English language is a tool that can express the meaning of Indigenous concepts if not fully, at least conceptually and ensure that all information is culturally relevant first in the Southern Indigenous context, and then in the Northern one). Dealing with the challenge of maintaining meaning across translations is what I sometimes facetiously referred to as being *lost in translation*.

**Final Thoughts**

The researcher’s personal location is not the only consideration. Personal location is also a useful tool for understanding the complexity of peoples’ lives and identities, especially when dealing with a highly nuanced topic such as Indigenous identity. In this study, the research participants shared their personal stories for three reasons: first, to understand their motivations for doing the work they do; second, to allow them to reflect on their personal journeys and provide a reflective moment for both researcher and participant to consider how to bring about positive changes in the manner in which they are perceived by virtue of their Indigenous identity; and third, to provide the reader with an understanding of the heterogeneity of the experiences and positions of Indigenous peoples today: we are not “all the same” and therefore no one of us can
speak on behalf of all Indigenous peoples. But finally, there is a lesson of hope to be learned that counteracts the grim and negative accounts and reports written about Indigenous peoples.

I end with a reflection on the research process by citing Linda T. Smith (1999) where she suggests that a decolonizing approach to research necessitates a *righting* of the stories told about Indigenous peoples, which in turn requires a questioning of discursive authority (Clifford, 1986), an interpretation of the other (Fine, 1994; Lincoln & Denzin, 1994; Lincoln, Denzin, & Smith, 2008; Min-ha, 1989), and the constructions of culture, race and gender and their intersections. Through this methodological approach it is possible to produce situated meanings that determine the social relations of particular groups at a given time. I suggest that challenging the stereotypes produced by mainstream interpretations of Indigenous peoples can open new insights into the true humanity and adaptability of Indigenous peoples. As Egla Martinez (2005) has suggested, challenging mainstream interpretations is about exemplifying how Maya women and men have adapted to extremely racialized and “gendered socio-economic, political and cultural exclusion by developing an ‘everyday praxis,’ defined broadly as a ‘form of resistance to domination and oppression through a continuous learning from socially situated experiences’” (p. 452).

Following Martinez, I attempted to apply a decolonizing approach by letting Indigenous perspectives, texts, oral accounts, and stories inform the research as well as the analysis and presentation of the knowledge created. This includes reflecting upon my own story and reflective process. Indigenous research methodologies allow for this critical analysis of the motives and assumptions behind the research in order to refute claims of universality for the knowledge created. I cannot claim the participants hold one unique and universal perspective nor are their circumstances or life stories identical: Indigenous Maya peoples cannot be lumped together into a single category. Rather, their stories and my own provide the complexity and richness that makes the creation of an Indigenous Maya education model a challenge. In the next Chapter I discuss some of the important themes that contribute knowledge to Indigenous education.
Chapter 5
Ancestral Knowledge in MIE:
Implications for Constructions of Gender

Figure 5. Grandmother Moon, Ixchel. Image used with permission of the University of Arizona.

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14 Grandmother Ixchel as seen in the Dresden Codex. She is responsible for birthing, healing, and weaving. Retrieved from http://www.library.arizona.edu/exhibits/mexcodex/dre74.htm
Introduction

Los esquemas de la corriente del feminismo tienen cosas en común con la cosmología Maya.

Feminist models share common aspects with Maya cosmology. (Cleotilde Vásquez, February 15, 2007)

How does ancestral knowledge inform May Indigenous education (MIE)? How does it affect gender constructions from Maya standpoints? In the previous Chapters I have discussed how ancestral knowledge and values generally still guide the lives of Maya peoples today. I have also discussed how centering these values and knowledge would potentially result in different forms of theorizing, analysis, and conducting research. I now combine all of these elements in a discussion of the participants’ understandings of gender constructions and their engagement with issues that contest gender violence and discrimination from the perspective of decolonization. To explain, taking a gender decolonizing perspective aims to focus on the gendered nature of Indigenous knowledge through a concept unique to Maya culture: Jun Winaq’. Thus, it relies on the Jun Winaq’ as its unit of analysis to discuss if indeed women and men are valued and honored in the same manner.

The general purpose of this Chapter is to center the narratives and insights of the women and men who participated in my study to understand their conceptualizations of gender. This finding and contribution to Indigenous feminisms organically emerged through the conversations held about the gendered nature of Indigenous Maya knowledge and the tensions that exist between Western feminist (mostly liberal) positions in Guatemala and Maya concepts that could address the imbalance present in gender relations today. The need to find common ground to discuss gender concepts directly speaks to Cleotilde Vásquez’s claim that feminisms share common aspects with Maya cosmology. Thus, I ask: What aspects (if any) does Maya ancestral knowledge share with the Western concept of gender? The answers to this question allow me to develop a working definition of gender based on Maya concepts to explore further in future research. This working definition also allows me to reflect on the literature regarding the goals of feminism in general and thus, analyze the differences in terminology and understanding of gender between Indigenous women and men as well as between feminists and nonfeminists. In
addressing the divergence in viewpoints, I seek to further complicate the interpretations based on the life experiences of each participant to the extent to which they understand the practice of Indigenous philosophies with respect to gender balance. Finally, in outlining the main debates and tensions between gender constructions and understandings of balance, I aim to illustrate positive and concrete examples of restoring balance between Indigenous women and men, and Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples through the practice of the Jun Winaq’. I posit that, even where Indigenous teachings are gender specific, they do not isolate women and men in confined gender roles and values as they are in Western constructions.

As already posited throughout this research, Maya Indigenous standpoints and philosophies are not only discursive but present and active. They provide not only a site from which to contest colonization but also an example of how we can together stand up against injustice through the process of becoming complete beings in tune with the universe, without exerting harm on one another. Further, Maya Indigenous standpoints and philosophies extend current theorizations of gender to unmask the implications of what Sandy Grande (2004) refers to as the Whitestream feminist discourse. This discourse centers Whiteness and becomes the cultural capital of Whites in the United States—regardless of a person’s sociodemographic location—and undermines or erases the non-Anglo, non-European experience. My understanding of this discourse is that feminists who confine themselves to it will never accept their own contribution to the maintenance of the colonial project via their tendency to assume that dominant feminist discourse emancipates all women based on their sameness. For example, the refusal of Whitestream feminists to “theorize the intersections of economics, labor, production and exploitation” counter the decolonizing goals of Native feminism. Maya standpoints offer options to address contemporary issues such as exclusion, violence, and poverty through material and spiritual lenses. Although I do not claim Maya gender constructions or the proposed unit of analysis, the Jun Winaq’, are panacea for social transformation, the Maya position provides another perspective, one that re-centers spirituality and offers many possibilities for the acceptance and valuing of all human beings regardless of gender. Moreover, I posit that Indigenous women have long maintained a concept of sovereignty and democracy through the decision-making positions have held within the home and community over time. This democracy is expressed through negotiations and consensus building for the benefit of the entire family and communities affected by the decisions made.
Indigenous women’s position or power has allowed Maya communities to thrive in spite of colonization. In honoring women, the Maya honor the ancestral understanding that each person (woman or man) has a responsibility to bring balance to any given situation. I hope to demonstrate that the imposition of Eurocentric values through the organization of society on its knowledge, values and ways of being have rendered invisible Indigenous understandings of gender identities. From Whitestream (Grande, 2004) perspectives, Indigenous gender identities focus solely on cultural aspects of Indigeneity that obscure the diversity of opinions regarding appearance, identity markers, what it means to be Indigenous today, and religious affinities (Grande, 2004, p. 124). These cultural dimensions of identity have glossed over the political projects of sovereignty and self-determination that unite Indigenous women with Indigenous men while also maintaining a critical eye and resistance to situations where men adopt and enact heteropatriarchal (Smith, 2008) acts that oppress women. Finally, this Chapter also offers a space in which to reflect upon the domination of knowledge produced in the academy, in particular languages that can obscure the lived experiences of Indigenous peoples and create false dichotomies between valid and invalid knowledge, theory and practice and other concepts. In the next section I briefly describe the context of the perceptions of Maya women in Guatemala.

The Context and Situation of Maya Women

Indigenous peoples in Guatemala comprise more than half of the population; yet, we have the least access to education (United Nations, 2005a, 2005b). Moreover, the public education system is deficient in that the curriculum is inconsistent with the philosophies, languages, and ways of understanding the world of Indigenous peoples. Part of this deficiency can be explained by the fact that international donors and development agencies have focused on increasing access to education for women and girls based on the assumption that:

Guatemala is characterized as a male-dominated or machista society, in both the ladino and Indigenous populations. Decision-making, and political, social, and economic resources historically have been controlled by men. This control is reflected in lower levels of educational achievement and literacy for women, fewer women holding political offices, lower earnings for women in formal sector employment and less property ownership, and high levels of gender-based violence and maternal mortality. (USAID, 2009, p. 5)
When I first read the above quote, I felt nauseated. This report is only one of many that homogenize all women in Guatemala as being victims of patriarchy. As a unit of analysis, patriarchy obscures the roles colonization and its aftermath of racism and neoliberalism. Although it is important to note that Indigenous women and girls have limited access to schooling and high drop-out rates, this report ignores the unquantifiable factors that elevate their status in their communities. For example, there is no recognition of Indigenous women’s contributions to the informal economy, the education of their children, and the reproduction of culture. Education, in this sense, refers to teaching children the importance of filling their tummies along with their minds and spirits. The reality calls into question the static definitions of Indigenous peoples as victimized based on Western concepts of individual rights and economic self-reliance and the suitability of assimilating Indigenous groups into the modern nation-state as a way of redressing these injustices.

An important aspect of understanding Indigenous women’s situation relates to the concept of material poverty. María Alicia Telón provided me with an insight regarding the importance of extending an analysis of poverty beyond material dimensions. Her proposal takes into account the four dimensions of poverty: emotional, spiritual, intellectual, and material. She stated that analyzing the factors that continue to subdue Indigenous peoples into spiritual poverty is important because spirituality has kept Indigenous Maya peoples alive since colonization:

La pobreza, en nuestra cultura, no solamente es material. Entonces si vemos la pobreza, tal como nuestra cultura la ve, podemos salir de ser pobres. Y, si no, saldremos de pobres económicamente pero seguiremos siendo pobres para nuestra comunidad. Entonces la pobreza hay que vencerla, si, desde la parte material pero desde la parte espiritual también. Y desde la pobreza afectiva dicen los ancianos, las ilusiones, los sentimientos. … Cuando se tiene claridad de eso, sí se puede salir de la pobreza. Si hablamos de pobreza material, intelectual, emotiva y espiritual entonces uno ya sabe en qué condiciones está y como salir de ellas. En cuanto a la pobreza espiritual, que es fundamental en nuestra cultura, la solución es principios y valores de vida: dar y recibir vida, dar y recibir consejos.

Poverty, in our culture, is not limited to the material realm. Therefore, if we look at poverty from our cultural lens, then we can cease being poor. If we don’t [see it from a cultural viewpoint] then we may cease being economically poor but we will continue to be poor in the eyes of our community. Therefore, it is true that we
have to overcome poverty from a material perspective but also from a spiritual one. And also, as the Elders say, from an affective point [that affects] our dreams and feelings. … And so, when we are clear on that point, we can cease being poor. If we speak of material, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual poverty, then we understand what conditions we are presently in and how to get out of them. And in terms of spiritual poverty, the solution is to reclaim the principles and values of life: those who give and take away life, and to those who give and take council. (Maria Alicia Telon, March 6, 2007)

Maria Alicia’s observation that Maya ancestral knowledge teaches us that we must overcome poverty on all levels is, to some extent, revolutionary. It is revolutionary because it elucidates an analysis that transcends the material realities of a world bound to the generation of global capital and access to material goods. Therefore, Telon’s view echoes transnational feminism (Grewal & Kaplan, 2000), and even some Indigena (Grande, 2004) and Indigenous scholars (Mihesuah, 1998; Smith, 2005) who see the material effects of colonialism as exemplified by capitalism, globalization, and transnational movements of capital as central elements to resist, contest, and transform. On this point, Grewal and Kaplan (2000) state:

To move to this kind of critical approach we need a notion of transnationality to help us differentiate our practices from those of global feminism. Transnational feminist practices refer us to the interdisciplinary study of the relationships between women in diverse parts of the world. These relationships are uneven, often unequal, and complex. They emerge from women's diverse needs and agendas in many cultures and societies. Given a very heterogeneous and multi-faceted world, how do we understand and teach about the condition of women? ... We need to teach students how to think about gender in a world whose boundaries have changed. Since recent scholarship has shown us that gender, class, religion, and sexuality produce different kinds of women in relation to different kinds of patriarchies, we must design classes that present a more complex view of how women become “women” (or other kinds of gendered subjects) around the world. In addition, we need to teach about the impact of global forces such as colonialism, modernization, and development on specific and historicized gendering practices that create inequalities and asymmetries. (no page #)

Grewal and Kaplan’s view reflects some convergence with Indigenous views on the particularities and diversity of women around the world and how the category woman is constructed. However, it is useful, first, to note the assumption that patriarchy is the central organizing principle for gender relations in all societies. But more important, I interpret this position as one that offers little hope for attaining a society that is balanced and one in which
violence against one another has ended. In comparison to María Alicia Telon’s position, the kind of feminist analyses that seem hopeless about the possibility of ending injustice seem to render invisible the spiritual dimension of knowledge production, acquisition, and interpretation fundamental to Indigenous philosophies. Telon’s suggestion that poverty is not only material does not, however, deny the importance of looking at oppression from material standpoints. It is evident through looking at development data (United Nations, 2007/2008) and through personal observations that Indigenous women experience material poverty and systemic violence more often than any other group of racialized peoples. I want to highlight, however, the validity of her observation that for Indigenous peoples and women in particular, we need to also take seriously the call to move beyond material discourses and center Maya spiritual practices, beliefs, and notions of transformation. This change works toward healing the wounds of colonization. Only through this practice will we become self-sufficient and attain healing from the remnants of colonization (Wane, 2006).

In order for renewal to take place, future and present generations need to learn about different perspectives that center Indigenous knowledge. Ancestral knowledge from Elders and community leaders who understand the need to shed the dependency on capitalism, colonial nation-states, and material goods alone demonstrate that interrelational and intergenerational aspects of Indigenous knowledge are needed in the education system. In the next section, I further discuss how Grandmother’s knowledge helps to frame my argument regarding commonalities between particular feminisms and Indigenous understandings of gender, women and gender-based roles.

**Maya Indigenous Understandings of Gender Through Indigenous Knowledge**

The theme of Indigenous knowledge and particularly the knowledge of Maya women stems from a common theme to which the participants alluded: the need to find ways to address the undervaluing and exclusion of Indigenous women today from a Maya epistemological and etymological basis. Not satisfied that “gender talk” actually addresses the issue of imbalance from a Maya perspective, I will demonstrate how Maya Indigenous education (MIE) proponents posit ways of reclaiming and living by those values today, specifically through the concept of *Jun Winaq’* or the Complete Being.
The concept of *Jun Winaq* illustrates that MIE goes beyond Western constructs of teaching and learning, showing how Indigenous peoples can lead by example in their places of work and communities to center their cultural location and epistemological standpoint as Maya Indigenous peoples. *Jun Winaq* alludes to the possibilities of addressing the social relations between women and men and the imbalance that still exists as viewed through Western gender and feminist lenses. While I have clearly stated that feminist language and analysis does not fully address Indigenous communities’ concerns, I also would like to suggest its usefulness. Transnational feminist analyses provide certain analytical tools for reflection upon the ways in which the movement of global capital has weakened nation-states and, as such, provides the ground to propose alternative ways of governing that resemble Indigenous conceptualizations of land and territory. However, I agree with Sandy Grande (2004) and Andrea Smith (2011) who suggest that in a world where the Western nation-state is the “only” arena in which Indigenous peoples can overcome our oppressions, “Native peoples become the subalterns that normalize the colonial nation-state” (Smith, 2011, p. 57). I am suggesting that it is a valuable exercise to engage with the notion of transnational actors who can address transformation from the longstanding ties to colonialism, racism, and imperialism. This engagement can also question a romanticized notion that gender is the only elements unifying women globally, while simultaneously working to lay the groundwork for more productive and equitable social relations among women across borders and cultural contexts (Grewal & Kaplan, 2000).

However, I would also like to point out the tension between transnational feminisms and Indigenous philosophies. This tension arises from the fact that their analyses are rooted in material discourse and relations to mediate feminist liberatory projects in the context of global relations between women across nation states. The spiritual dimension is silenced. Notwithstanding, I do find their analyses of gendered and racialized subjects useful in supporting the critique of Western feminism as a body of theory embedded in colonial power relations. Future research into the divergences and convergences between these perspectives is needed to set parameters for discussing this topic and building the curriculum contents for MIE. For now, it is important to address how Grandmother’s knowledge has taken a back seat to Grandfather’s knowledge in practice. It is important to acknowledge and analyze this trend because it highlights the acceptance of colonial impositions of ways of organizing and being. This
hierarchy contradicts the evidence of Maya Grandmother’s importance found in ceremonial objects, art, oral stories, political and spiritual roles in community and within family structures.

Indigenous women’s knowledge is extensive and is found in archaeological sites as well as in community. This knowledge is shared by Indigenous women today as it has always been. The constructions of gender found in these objects illustrate the distinct ways in which women and gender were conceptualized in the past. These gender constructions also allow contemporary Maya to analyze power differentials, which suggests that not only Western, Whitestream concepts provide powerful tools through which to analyze power relations in any society. Thus, reclaiming these stories and the concepts that underlie them contribute to valuing Indigenous knowledge and theorizing. This understanding suggests that factors informing gender construction and value extend beyond biological and socially constructed roles and expectations. Rather, there is a direct relationship between the process of becoming Jun Winaq’ and a person’s life purpose based on the interpretation of each person’s gifts and paths as illustrated through the sacred Lunar Maya calendar, the Tzolk’in. All of these factors inform my discussion of the role Indigenous women have in education, through what I refer to as Grandmother’s knowledge (GK). In addition, it is important to highlight the political goals of centering the discussion of gender roles and balance. The political implication of speaking from Maya concepts, value systems, and language in education is their role in efforts to decolonize. To resist the way in which Western and dominant society only place value on Maya philosophies if the foundations of neocolonial institutions and codes of behavior remain unchallenged. In other words, when Maya women and men unite against educational content and pedagogies that render invisible Indigenous understandings of land and territory based on an ethic of responsibility and interrelationships instead of ownership (Denetdale, 2008; Kahaleole-Hall, 2008; Smith, 2008), even though some feminist tenets espouse a critical position of social justice, collaboration often stops when proposals for the transformation of Whitestream and neocolonial institutions that provide dominant bodies and ideologies with benefits are put forward.

During my research, I became quite involved with Majawil Q’ij, a Maya women’s association working in the area of Indigenous women’s rights. In an effort to make their work relevant and engage their own knowledges, leaders and communities where they work always make a point to remember important Maya woman leaders of the past and present. Examples
abound in art, oral stories, and the *Pop Vuh*. Archaeological objects illustrate that during the classic period women held positions of power as decision makers among the elite nobility (U’k’Ux B’e, as cited in Majawil Q’ij, 2002, p. 72). For example, Lady of Yaxchilan held the political title of Lady of Bacab, a name given only to supreme governors. Another important figure is María Guarchaj who, as an Indigenous Maya Kich’e’ leader during the colonial period, refused to pay tribute in the form of cotton cloth to the Spanish Crown and suffered the death penalty for her resistance (U’k’Ux B’e, as cited in Majawil Q’ij, 2002, p. 72). Like many depictions found in clay figurines, Maya women still practice their role as leaders and some sit in community positions such as Elders’ councils and community boards. These present-day examples provide evidence that women hold highly valued sociopolitical positions in Maya culture.

The evidence of female leaders who held high status positions in Indigenous societies challenges the assumption that male domination is universal or embedded in Indigenous cultures (St. Denis, 2007, p. 37). It also challenges the Whitestream understanding of value based on the division between public and private spheres that assumes that Indigenous women’s roles as nurturers and caretakers have less value than other, public roles, such as male leadership. Further, it counters the notion that these roles are static and not interchangeable (Hookimaw-Witt, 2006). The act of looking back at history and centering the role of important female figures in Indigenous societies can illustrate how their status was diminished through the introduction of Euro-Western religion, ways of organizing, and governing structures thus revealing the complex effects of colonialism. Providing examples of female leadership, while dismantling the notion that male domination is universal and inherent in Indigenous cultures, works to shift the analysis from patriarchy to colonization. Therefore, colonization becomes the entry point into looking at how balance was maintained in traditional Maya societies. I do not intend to romanticize Indigenous cultures, but I do suggest that the gender imbalance in Maya societies increased because of the disruption of ceremonial practices that served to restore balance. This disruption occurred in part through the destruction of sacred books, codices, spiritual guides and medicine people. Colonization imposed its views and ways of life onto Indigenous communities with varying degrees of success: as Turpel (2000) states, we “do not have a history of unequal gender relations. We didn’t have to fight for our place in our societies” (Turpel, 2000, as cited in St. Denis, 2007, p. 36).
Cristina Coroxón is a living example of an Indigenous woman leader. She served as mayor of her community in San Isidro, Sololá. San Isidro is a small, Kaqchik’el-speaking community, northwest of Guatemala City and on the outskirts of Lake Atitlán. The soil in this area is rich. This combined with its temperate climate makes it an ideal area to produce diverse crops for sustenance as well as for national and international trade. Cristina’s community is under the jurisdiction of the Elder’s council in Santiago, the main neighboring town. Her community in San Isidro elected by her to this post due to the respect she has earned through her community work. Her efforts aim to make the community a better place through sharing and promoting Indigenous ways of living and being, particularly in conflict resolution and economic sustainability. Her post allowed her to work in areas of her own interest, such as the improvement and diversification of Indigenous women’s economic production based on native crops produced locally and the promotion of Indigenous women’s health.

I came to know Cristina after I accepted an invitation to attend an event sponsored by the CNEM. This event had the objective of introducing some Italian doctoral students to the surrounding communities of Lake Atitlán, particularly Sololá (the main city centre). This community has the particular characteristic of having a majority Indigenous population dispersed around the lake. They speak three Maya languages: Kich’e’, Tzutujil and Kaqchik’el. I was also invited to share my knowledge about Indigenous research methodologies with the group of graduate students and to meet some of the traditional Indigenous authorities. I met Cristina through another Kaqchik’el community leader, who in the end could not partake in the interview process due to time constraints. Therefore, I met Cristina several months prior to the final interview. When I finally visited Cristina’s community, our interactions were quite familiar. This familiarity came visible in how she asked me to come over for lunch, so I could also meet her family. Therefore, I arrived a few hours prior to lunch so we could talk and work. Later on, our conversation became part of making lunch. Amidst her family coming and going—she prepared soup with a local crab her husband caught in nearby Lake Atitlán, fresh tortillas made by her and local fruit she picked from her garden. She shared how her community is each day being encroached upon by large multinational companies. One of the problems is that the territory and land the community lives on is not under their title. The government has taken advantage of the situation by declaring that the land has no owners. This legal claim over Indigenous lands and a deficient system of education in which teachers only speak Spanish (despite the fact the area is
considered bilingual and thus, by law, a bilingual teacher is required) combine to make material poverty and reliance on outside capital a reality. Cristina also mentioned that subsistence farming was diminishing because of a lack of land, lack of supplies, and intrusion of large landowners to cultivate the land for multinationals. Given the increasing scarcity of remunerated economic activities and the decreasing amounts of land available to local peoples, Indigenous Kaqchik’el women like her have had to resort to engaging in local economic endeavors to improve their lives.

Cristina also discussed her engagement with education. She grew up in a rural community where discrimination and racism dominated and some mothers felt they had to protect their children by not sending them to school. Other mothers stopped teaching their children their Indigenous Maya language for fear they would not succeed in a Spanish dominated society. Her mother opted for the latter. Cristina stated, “I could not speak my language or Spanish well and was afraid to participate in my community but also outside of my community.” In short, her own perception that she had poor skills in either language prevented her from participating inside and outside of her community. When I asked why she felt her language skills did not provide her with the necessary tools to continue learning her own language, she shared that she was ridiculed for not being fluent in either language. Her own shame for not understanding in a “proper manner” thus devalued the local political work she wanted to engage in. Her experience mirrors the dilemma my own grandmother faced when she decided to leave her community to provide a better future for her family. Likewise, participants shared how many parents struggle when offered the option of having their children learn Indigenous languages in schools. Some parents feel that teaching Indigenous languages at school is unnecessary because they already speak them at home, while others feel strongly about teaching their maternal language from the outset at school so children will learn how to read and write it. The proponents of imparting early education in a child’s maternal language are guided by Maya teachings regarding life cycles. This teaching reinforces the importance of strengthening children in their linguistic, cultural, spiritual, and political identities in the first 7 years of their lives (María Alicia Telón, personal communication, 2008).

Feelings of exclusion based on language barriers divide communities. Not being fluent in an Indigenous language prevents one from understanding some cultural concepts and, therefore,
applying them to their fullest, particularly in academic settings. In spite of these challenges, Cristina, like others who do not speak their original languages for various reasons, takes great pains to learn both languages. These efforts to revitalize languages allow for communicating research and ideas in an accessible language. Communicating in Indigenous Maya languages also provide a great service in that it facilitates the transmission of Indigenous ideas to the dominant, Spanish-speaking population. In Cristina’s case, having both Kaqchik’el and Spanish language skills has helped her navigate and serve as an interpreter between her community and outsiders. She shared an example of this: she has helped mediate conflicts in order to resist the encroachment of multinational corporations upon her community. She shared that, in her role as Mayor of San Isidro, she is asked to mediate conflicts in her community. Her understanding of community service provides an example of how the phrase “All our relations” centers her particular role and participation as an Indigenous Kaqchik’el woman. This example runs in contradistinction to “Whitestream” (hooks, 1984; Mohanty, 2003) liberal feminist ideas of seeking equal access to the same roles as men fulfill for the purpose of gaining power (Grande, 2004; La Rocque, 2007). However, it also demonstrates the need to decolonize gender in educational contexts from culturally specific understandings of gender constructions. This culturally grounded construction is tied to Maya epistemology, particularly spiritual understandings of the cosmos and of the interrelationship of all beings.

Participants shared their views about the importance of the Maya lunar calendar Tzolk'in for the social fabric of Maya society and for balancing energies that are out of balance. The process of balancing alludes to a culturally specific way to resist all injustices, not only those arising from patriarchy. An example of the ideal balance is evident in the symbols found in weaving, paintings, and ceremonial objects.
Este símbolo nos indica los ciclos de armonía y de balance que deben de haber en el ser humano … entonces, igual en lo que respecta a hombres y mujer, a veces estamos aquí (arriba) o aquí (abajo) pero, donde quiera que estemos necesitamos mantenernos en equilibrio y en armonía. Entonces, los más espirituales dicen que es la conexión entre el Formador y Creador y nosotros.

This symbol exemplifies the cycles of harmony and balance that must exist within a human … in terms of women and men, sometimes we are here (above) or here (below), but, anywhere we may be we need to live in harmony and balance. Therefore, the most spiritual people tell us this is the connection between Creator and us. (María Alicia Telón, March 6, 2007)

María Alicia Telón explained to me that the symbol in the middle of the weaving (see Figure 6), which looks like a bigger person than the four women and men above and below, represents our Maya ancestors. This weaving sums up my own understanding of interconnectedness and life cycles, as understood in the process of becoming Jun Winaq’. It illustrates that we are all connected to our ancestors, whether we are women or men. The centrality of ancestral teaching and Elders to our everyday lives and an understanding of our past

Figure 6. Photograph of a weaving of the First Four Women and Men. Used with permission from María Alicia Telón.
makes it imperative to reject the colonial attitudes imposed since contact. These attitudes, which devalue women, are precisely what Indigenous and Maya education, specifically, are trying to transform.

**Dimensions of Indigenous Gender Constructions: Balance as Unit of Analysis**

A recurring theme throughout this dissertation is that I base my understanding of gender and gender relations on the teachings I have received through stories, ceremony, and my own perception of gender roles in Maya culture. I build on the work of other Indigenous scholars who identify as feminists and whose work seeks to include Indigenous women in feminist discourse (Cunningham, 2006) as Native or Indigenous feminists (Deerchild, 2003; Gunn-Allen, 1986; Mihesuah, 2003; Smith, 2005, 2008; Trask, 1996). But also on the work of activists and scholars who refuse to accept the label *feminist* because it is inextricably tied to Western ideologies (Jaimes-Guerrero, 1997; Hookimaw-Witt, 2006; hooks, 1984, 1998; Monture-Angus, 1995). The two positions raise tensions outside and within Indigenous communities, mainly because of misguided assumptions about what constitutes a “valid” or “more authentic” position. My intention is not to resolve these tensions, but rather to add to Mihesuah’s (2003) discussion on the heterogeneity of Indigenous women’s experiences, voices and positions regarding what it means “to be Native” (p. 6). Accepting the existence of multiple constructions of womanhood has pedagogical implications. It illustrates the possibility for many opinions, theories, and approaches to teaching and learning that are valid each in its own context. It demonstrates the art of maintaining balance so that power is kept in a horizontal spectrum.

As already discussed, several scholars posit that most Western feminist theories devalue Indigenous women’s roles in community and at home through a universal correlation between women’s *visible* participation in public spaces and *perceptions* of gender oppression (Denetdale, 2006; Hookimaw-Witt, 2006; Mohanty, 2002; L. T. Smith, 1999). These perceptions based on Western value systems assert the need to find *material evidence* to prove or disprove the oppression of women in nondominant societies. It is already a lost battle to argue against a perception deeply embedded in a worldview with a different values system. However, I feel that this divergence between Western and Indigenous value systems opens up dialogue about what the concept of balance means to *any* society. Can balance be attained when only men are valued?
What happens when Indigenous women and Indigenous men specifically treat each other with respect, value, and reciprocity? This position echoes an anticolonial importance assigned to Indigenous women’s power and agency that is often found in Black feminist thought (Collins, 1991; Wane, 2006). Maya women and men who strive to maintain balance and live their MIK apply the concept of shifting “power” or positioning, as suggested by Chilisa and Ntseane (2009). This concept shows that women and men both possess value and importance horizontally, at different times, and based on different contexts. To illustrate, I want to share Cleotilde’s story about how she learned about her place in society and the roles she could play based on her gender:

Yo no tuve acceso al nivel sistemático de la educación. La distancia de acceder a un espacio físico de la educación. Yo no podría decir que estaba lejos, porque estaba a 14kms. Sin embargo las condiciones en las que yo estaba no eran las adecuadas. Entonces yo, igual que toda niña del área rural, yo a diferencia nací en el área urbana de un municipio. Pero, desde las condiciones de pobreza, extrema pobreza, soy la mayor de 8 hermanos y sin duda también de padres analfabetos – mi padre no fue a la escuela y mi madre no fue a la escuela – entonces, sin embargo allí es donde creo en la misión. Yo creo que ya traía eso muy marcado porque desde esa edad yo luché por que mi vida no siguiera en esas circunstancias. Luchar porque yo quería una situación distinta, diferente. Y desde esa edad yo empecé a romper esquemas impuestos. Por ejemplo, cómo jugar con los varones, jugar un juego que se da en las comunidades y jugaba con los varones. Y tuve la suerte que ni mi mamá ni mi papá no me dijeron de que porqué yo jugaba con los hombres. No hagas eso. No me lo dijeron. Incluso, yo estoy en el análisis de ¿porqué no me lo dijeron? De pronto tal vez a ellos tampoco les dijeron. Porque de pronto no había esa diferencia de que los hombres aquí y las mujeres allá. Sino que creo que allí es donde a veces tengo aún mi punto de análisis. A mi no me dijo mi papá “Eso es prohibido para ti. Eso no es válido. Esto no se hace.” No. Yo, al igual que los muchachos hacía cosas que eso creo que, no creo, afirmo que marcaron la diferencia en comparación y en relación a las experiencias de otras niñas que está muy marcada esa relación, esa distancia. Entonces, eso fue dándome como la oportunidad de desenvolverme en otro nivel.

I did not have access to formal education. … I [unlike other girls in the rural area] was born in the urban area of a municipality. But in conditions of poverty, extreme poverty, I am the oldest of eight brothers and was born to illiterate
parents—my father did not go to school and my mother did not go to school—however I believe this is where I received my mission [destiny]. I think this experience impacted me at that age because I fought hard to improve my life. From this early age I started to break imposed [social] patterns of behavior. For example, I played with boys, a game we have that we still play in our community. And I was lucky that neither my mother nor my father questioned why I was playing with the boys. They never told me, “Do not do that.” No. They never said that. And to this day, I analyze and ask why did they not tell me that? But then I wonder if they were not told either. I suddenly realized that we were not separated based on our gender: men here and women there. But I think that's where I learned [about gender roles]. My father did not say, “This is forbidden for you. That is not valid. This is not done.” No. I grew up doing the things that young boys do. I think that made a difference in relation to the experiences of other girls who hold that division [of gender roles], that distance. So, that was giving me the opportunity to develop on another level. (Cleotilde Vásquez, March 15, 2007)

Cleotilde’s experience reveals the ways in which her parents were raised. Although she was born in an urbanized setting, her parents still educated her with values rooted in Maya epistemology. Her gender did not prevent her from participating in the games of boys. She recounts the ways in which she witnessed the gender division and yet her experience differed from that of her female peers. As a result, she developed and continued to cultivate Maya values regarding gender roles and the importance of children playing according to their abilities (physical and emotional) as opposed to a prohibition on girls playing boys’ games. Her brothers also display the break with accepted Western gender roles. For instance, if her brothers were at home before anyone else got home, they would cook. Gender roles are fluid. If a family had only daughters, then one of them would fulfill the roles a son would typically carry out. In short, even though there are roles marked by gender, they are not static and their value is not based on whether a woman or a man carries them out. This example highlights the gendered nature of colonialism and also the processes used to naturalize female characteristics of weakness, timidity, and best suited for taking care of tasks inside the home (La Rocque, 1997). Authors such as L. T. Smith (1999) argue that colonialism is implicated in the breakdown of Indigenous societies, a “disordering by a colonial power which positioned its own women as the property of men with roles that were primarily domestic” (L. T. Smith, 1999, p. 151). Therefore, Cleotilde highlights her escape from the imposition of values and social ordering based on the view of and
the nature of women as inferior and conquerable, as espoused in colonial and neocolonial education and the Christian belief systems that normalize these attitudes. Cleotilde’s story illustrates that although her parents never attended school, their educating of their family in Maya values was an important aspect of her development and affected her eventual life choice to continue passing those values on to Maya women and men.

The above example also demonstrates how the Western notions of hierarchy and competing “power struggles” are contested. It also provides an interlocking (Collins, 1991) analysis of how gender identities shift and how when particular dominant gender identities gain power over other group identities and deem them inferior, a problem ensues and balance is lost. The consequence of this power imbalance is reflected in dysfunctional families, relationships, and communities.

A male participant, Daniel Domingo, reflected on how to achieve balance by reclaiming and conceptualizing Maya concepts of gender within education and in institutionalized discourse. He posited that Maya education can benefit from empirically measuring the impact of learning about Maya conceptualizations of gender through the concepts of Jun Winaq’ and complementarity, or kabawil. He proposed to interview couples or families that have reclaimed their Indigenous Maya values and cosmology through ceremony. His idea is to explore the changes they have witnessed in themselves and as families as a way of documenting perspectives and conceptualizations of gender and gender relations from Maya perspectives (Daniel Domingo, Workshop, January 30, 2008). His recommendation highlights one of the limitations of this study in that it only reflects the positions and voices of a limited number of participants. Therefore, my study only represents an entry point to developing a concept applicable across diverse Indigenous communities in Guatemala and within the education system. Daniel’s research direction echoes other participants’ perceptions about the importance of developing and agreeing upon concepts that come from Indigenous perspectives in order to challenge the Euro-American and Western theories learned at school. These theories, when disengaged from living praxis, impart only information or data. In contrast, Daniel’s recommendation emphasizes how Maya knowledge systems embody processes of observation and reflection in order to perfect philosophical understandings until each person can discern how to become whole. He alludes to how theory and praxis occur when this knowledge is applied and lived daily at home, in
community, and, most of all, in ceremony. These reflections guide the ways in which all people can dismantle the power imbalance between women and men.

**Gender imbalance**

Nuestro concepto, nuestra filosofía está, pero en nuestras prácticas hay muchas cosas que hay que cambiar … el concepto, el digamos hombre/mujer en la cultura, en la cosmovisión Maya, desde mi experiencia, no empezamos en la diferencia hombre y mujer sino que empezamos reconociendo en la dignidad que como seres existe.

Our concept, our philosophy exists, but there are many things we need to change in our day to day praxis … for instance, the concept of man/woman in our culture and from Maya cosmovision is, in my experience, one that is not founded on our [biological] differences but rather, we start by recognizing the dignity each one of us carries as living beings. (Ana Ventura, June 19, 2007)

I begin this section with Ana’s quote about her analysis of the gap between philosophy and praxis in her experience as a Maya woman. Her position reflects a covert understanding that internal critiques of Maya culture exist even if they are not often publicly discussed, particularly in political spaces where sovereignty and Indigenous rights trump issues of gender balance (Denetdale, 2006, 2008; Monture-Angus, 1995; A. Smith, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2011). This discussion is happening at different levels and particularly within Maya women’s groups. I take this analysis to form the basis for the proposition that gender imbalance and the denial that it exists comprise one of the barriers we encounter on the road to become Jun Winaq’. It is fitting to ask, where does an entire population learn to see women as inferior to men? What is the connection between colonialism, women’s subjugation, and violence against women? Since conquest, Victorian perceptions of women have abounded within the Euro-Christian tradition in Guatemala and in the imposed language, Spanish—a language that emphasizes gender and the imposition of male dominance. The colonizers imposed these patriarchal attitudes towards women on Indigenous populations (Hookimaw-Witt, 2006, p. 51; St. Denis, 2007, p. 45). Building Indigenous education from the wisdom and knowledge of the Maya ancestors is a powerful strategy to counteract the effects of colonization, mainly patriarchy and colonial

The remarks of Virginia Ajxup, another participant who is also a respected Elder and spiritual guide and timekeeper (*Aj qu’iy*), illustrate an important point that participants shared in this study in relation to the fluidity of culture in the context of understanding how values inform what we consider to be traditions. They add to Kim Anderson’s and Bonita Lawrence’s warning (2000, as cited in Archuleta, 2004) about traditions, and putting “Elders on pedestals and reclaiming traditions that mimic patriarchal ways” (p. 96). If there are Elders who claim that certain patriarchal ways are tradition, how can a person or community establish the claim that Maya culture is not patriarchal? The participants shared that one way to reconcile this obstacle lies in finding examples of families and knowledge keepers who maintain the core values of balance, reciprocity, and complementarity as expressed in Maya oral stories, creation stories, written documents, ceremonies, and art. To emphasize this view, Virginia Ajxup makes clear some aspects that distinguish between *tradition* and values in Maya philosophy:

> Los comportamientos y valores que nos ha transmitido la religión del occidente nos ha envenenado a tal punto que creemos que los hombres pensamos que la subordinación es *tradición*.

The attitudes and values transmitted through Western religion and education have indeed served to poison Indigenous culture to the point where many men (and women also) feel the subordination of women is *tradition* [emphasis added].

*(Virginia Ajxup, July 2, 2007)*

Virginia Ajxup’s distinction between the traditions (*tradiciones*) and the values that guide Maya peoples highlights that gender imbalance is not part of the Maya value system, but rather a situation resulting from colonization (Monture-Angus, 1995; L. T. Smith, 1999; A. Smith 2003, 2005, 2008, 2011). Traditions are fluid and change over time depending on the context—and this context depends on the values imparted and accepted. In her statement, Virginia highlights how the imposed Euro-Christian values of colonization have in fact devalued women and have created new beliefs, such as the belief that women’s subordination is a Maya tradition. Her statement also illustrates how relations between women and men in some Indigenous societies differ from those in Euro-Christian societies. On this point, Linda Smith (1999) states that,
“Indigenous women across many different societies claim an entirely different relationship, one embedded in beliefs about the land and the universe, about the spiritual significance of women and about the collective endeavors that were required in the society” (p. 151).

To demonstrate current applications of this analysis, it is important to remember that the current education system in Guatemala is based on Euro-American and Christian values and Indigenous ancestral knowledge is ignored. And, although the new National Base Curriculum (MINEDUC, 2005) did include a unit on the Maya calendar, participants shared that in the curriculum this knowledge is disconnected from real life applications, thus creating a gap between philosophy and praxis. In other words, the subject is taught in a manner that does not teach values that honor life, but continues to separate ancient knowledge from present-day Mayas, and ultimately renders the calendar as another piece of national folklore. Thus, children are still denied Maya oral stories and other documents such as paintings, sacred books, and textiles. These important pedagogical tools and approaches of MIK are either misinterpreted or ignored altogether.

But what constitutes Grandmother’s Knowledge (GK)? There is no set definition, but from the conversations and exchanges of knowledge during the research process, it is clear that it implies knowledge that comes from each person’s direct Grandmothers and also from a person’s ancestral lineage. Daniel Domingo and José Yac Noj both described this as knowledge that is passed on to both women and men. GK upholds women’s value not because women are superior to men or other beings in the universe, but rather because Maya cosmology values and respects all beings in its web.

The Maya women in the study stated that the honoring of GK is a noble goal, but to achieve it one has to overcome the stark realities that make Indigenous women vulnerable to poverty and violence. But it is important for all Maya peoples to strive to live by the concepts of GK and set examples in their families, communities, and places of work in order that it become a reality:

Estamos viviendo en un país con un sistema eminentemente colonial. No solamente el sistema sino que también el pensamiento y la ideología son coloniales. Imagínate, ese pensamiento se inyecta a través de las religiones. Hubo
un tiempo que se inyectó esta ideología a través del ejército. Y la escuela ha sido la mayor protagonista en inyectar estas ideologías coloniales. Definitivamente, en la educación formal, todos los conocimientos y los saberes de los Abuelos y las Abuelas no están incluidos. No solo no están incluidos sino que no se tiene ni el conocimiento ni la voluntad de incluirlos. Yo diría tal vez no solamente incluirlos pero vivenciarlos. Si es el mundo de las personas, eso debería de ser la materia prima sobre la cual se debería de solidificar y edificar la educación en Guatemala, específicamente la de los Mayas.

We live in a country that applies a colonial system. And it is not only the system but also the ideology and philosophy are colonial. Just imagine that this philosophy is injected through religions. There was a time when they used the army to pass this on. And now, school has served as the main player in passing down these colonial ideologies. So, definitely, formal education does not include the knowledge of our Grandmothers and Grandfathers. And not only are they excluded, but there is a lack of knowledge and will to include them … and live by them … This should be the basis upon which education, and specifically Maya education, is built in Guatemala. (Wuqub’ Iq’, May 24, 2007)

As I listened to his words, I remembered reciting dates and names of Spanish conquistadors—the invaders—in my own childhood. I also recall that at school there was much time devoted to learning the history of Guatemala as a nation built on Spanish values. There was hardly any mention of how the state forced many Indigenous peoples to shed the Maya identity, or the many policies aimed at converting the Indigenous population into a mixed-blood, Spanish-speaking majority. I do not remember learning the stories of my grandmother about how Maya understandings of the universe provides the basis for conceptualizations of women’s and men’s roles, values, and about complementarity, collectivity, and a sense of interconnectedness as opposed to individuality. These stories were erased because in Maya societies women had important roles to play, and this ran contrary to the colonizer’s treatment and valuing of their own women. In short, “Indigenous women would argue that their traditional roles included full participation in many aspects of political decision-making and marked gender separations which were complementary in order to maintain harmony and stability” (L. T. Smith, 1999, pp. 151–152).
Indigenous Maya Perspectives on Gender and Feminist Theories

Gender is theoretically conceived as “the socially constructed differences and relationships between women and men … that vary depending on their particular context, time and space” (Schmink, 2000, as cited in Huenchán Navarro, 2002, p. 127). The definition itself is not problematic because anyone could argue that all cultures—regardless of their values—do engage in some type of social division between both women and men. So, why is it that some Indigenous men and women are reluctant to use the term gender? How does the concept of Jun Winaq’ allow Indigenous Maya peoples to address power imbalances at the personal and systemic levels? These questions kept haunting me as I continued my field work. Upon analyzing the stories and the conflicts that typically arise between Indigenous women who do not ascribe to liberal feminism in Guatemala, I decided I needed to address the convergences and divergences between Western and Indigenous gender conceptualizations to demonstrate that Indigenous standpoints are as valid as feminist theorizing. This section highlights some of the convergences and divergences in an effort to engage in a dialogue regarding the colonial imposition of Whitestream (hooks, 1989) feminist theorizing in the academy.

Gender, like any other identity classification, is socially constructed. Its meaning and value are derived from particular cultural logics stemming from epistemological, ontological, and axiological specificities. Typically, and based on Western, Euro-American, material, ethnocentric and hierarchical understandings of the world, gender categories have positioned men at the top of a hierarchy that renders women invisible. As already stated in the theory section, this position is derived from Euro-Christian and Victorian values that render women inferior to men. This is evident in the Euro-Christian creation story, in which Adam is the supreme being and Eve is only made from his rib to provide him with companionship. The yardsticks with which the differences between men and women are measured are usually Western. In short, the relationships between women and men in any given society are not inherently problematic, but the value assigned to their roles can be.

Measuring the worth of women or men, children or adults, able-bodied or not, reflects Western categorizations centered on the notion of an ideal identity, that of a White, male, heterosexual, able-bodied, Euro-American (Grande, 2004; L. T. Smith, 1999; A. Smith, 2003,
This ideal denies the historical importance of Indigenous women. In Guatemala, Spanish values are evident in Christian organizations, such as the cofradías or religious brotherhoods. According to my great-aunt’s daughter, these organizations only accept male members, with the exception of the head cofrade or brother, who participates with his wife. This form of organization, as instituted by the Spanish Crown, which excludes women, has been accepted almost unanimously. However, she shared that near Rabinal, there is a cofradía or brotherhood that includes both men and women in an effort to reclaim Maya ancestral teachings about gender balance (Personal communication, June 2007). The cofradías are also spaces where young cofrades learn about traditional ways of leadership (López Mejía, 2006). By contrast, traditional Elders’ councils and Mayors are elected based on the conduct and respect earned in the community as part of a couple. It is evident from this and other communications I had with spiritual guides or ajqu’ ij’ab that colonization has only changed some forms of social organization in which women traditionally would participate in community and political undertakings. It is crucial that we examine these transformations but also places where ancestral teachings are still practiced. These examples provide further evidence that Western and Whitestream gender analyses diverge from Indigenous gender understandings. In the next section I discuss some of these divergences and how they determine the positions from which women, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, engage in politics.

Philosophical divergences from feminist gender analyses

Género occidental y Maya no es lo mismo, pero hay herramientas que se pueden utilizar para hacer un análisis de etnia.

Western and Maya [conceptualizations of] gender are not the same, but there are tools one can use to undertake an analysis based on ethnicity. (María Alicia Telón, March 6, 2007)

I begin this section with the quote above to provide a context from which to further nuance the view some Maya women hold regarding the application of non-Maya analyses to strengthen their own. In some ways, her statement displays the same tensions and diversity that is displayed within gender analyses provided by Indigenous feminists and womanists who refuse the label feminist. On this topic, Rosa Pu Tunux (2007), a Kaqchik’el Maya scholar, highlights
some of the tensions she has experienced in Guatemala between Indigenous and Western Whitestream gender analyses. She states that:

What is problematic is the praxis of gender analyses based solely on individualistic and individual rights discourses that on the one hand advocate for the right of women to choose in any area of their lives while simultaneously undervaluing the right of a woman to choose to stay at home and be compensated and recognized in qualitative and quantitative terms. (p. 55)

She argues that an individual rights discourse regarding women’s economic worth is a normative principle that dictates society’s perceptions of women and men and their roles. This gendered and economic organizing principle reinforces de Beauvoir’s argument that, “for gender what is important is not the biological difference between women and men but the value and significance that leads to their interpretation and consequential assignment of roles and application in all areas of social structure” (Pu Tunux, 2007, p.55). Analyzing hierarchical structures as a central organizing principle highlights power relations that posit all women as victims who face exclusion and assumes that all societies value men over women. Pu Tunux’s position does not suggest an idealization of women’s cultures as some radical and cultural feminists have proposed (Freedman, 2002, p. 87, as cited in St. Denis, 2007, p. 43). Rather, it questions the liberal feminist need to integrate women into male power structures. These male power structures not only exclude women, but also reflect colonial structures that have historically excluded Indigenous peoples. In Guatemala, where women gained the right to vote in 1945 and Indigenous peoples in 1985, these structures operate through the Constitution, (Bastos & Camús, 1999).

Again, as already illustrated in the example of the USAID report, Whitestream Western analyses of Indigenous societies ignore the positive examples of Indigenous communities that still value women and their roles. Moreover, they serve to demonize Indigenous communities, especially in the rural areas, as extremely sexist and violent. And while I am not suggesting that violence does not exist in these communities, violence against women in Guatemala happens regardless of their culture, class, or language. The existence of interfamily violence is real and Indigenous women’s groups actively engage in analysis and advocacy around this issue. What becomes problematic is the assumption that all Indigenous men are violent and are more violent than their non-Indigenous, urban counterparts.
Ignored is how traditional Indigenous ways of resolving conflict use community involvement to find balance in personal and conjugal lives. To explain further, Wuqub’ Iq’, a participant, told me a story about our creation. He shared that life, as evident in plants, animals, and the universe, needs both the female and the male side to exist. This was an excellent teaching moment for me because he illustrated this concept through his drawings. The drawings provided a visual representation of the principle of duality based on the unity of women and men that creates fusion, relationships, harmony, balance, and a starting point. He illustrated how all of this creates life. He explained at length how life emanates from the union of female and male energies as exemplified through the plant and animal world, including human beings. He further explained:

La fundación del concepto de la dualidad y de la complementariedad se ven a través del mundo natural … las plantas, los seres humanos y los animales necesitan de estas dos partes para unirse y convertirse en un ser.

The foundation of the concept of duality and complementarity are illustrated by the natural world … plants, humans, and animals require two parts to become one being. (Wuqub’ Iq’, May 24, 2007)

The above excerpt from my conversation with Wuqub’ Iq’ epitomizes the foundation of the concept of complementarity. It centers unity and balance as the philosophical and epistemological basis for understanding the roles and values ascribed to women and men in Maya societies (Hernández Castillo, 2002, 2005; Hookimaw-Witt, 2006; López Mejía, 2006; L. T. Smith, 1999). The central tenets of complementarity as a way of being are also reflected in Patricia Monture Angus’ (1987) statement that Aboriginal values underlie the social organization of Aboriginal societies (as cited in St. Denis, 2007, p. 37). This particular explanation of balance applies to all aspects of the universe and illustrates the context and philosophy behind our epistemology as Maya people. It is fitting to include it because it provides another example showing that not all present-day Maya individuals and communities are inherently machista (male chauvinist). The role of Indigenous education is to teach from these positions in order to reclaim the values lost through colonization. Indigenous education and the values proposed in it also move away from rights-based discourses that act as sites of contestation without reclaiming
and putting into practice philosophies that have always been there and that now need to be remembered.

Remembering the values inherent to our culture is by no means a way of romanticizing it. It is evident from the stories shared and my observations while in the field that Indigenous women and men engage in various efforts to show that machismo, sexism, and violence against women are not values inherent in our culture as expressed in our sacred books and oral stories. However, it is important to note that there is a clear understanding that gender equality is an ideal to reach. It is not currently a reality because of the acceptance and replication of Euro-Christian hierarchies that place men above women. It is evident that colonization brought some power to men and, for some, because of the convenience of accepting this power over women, over time, this has been accepted as the norm. This tradition, borrowed from the colonial history, needs to be demystified. Maya professionals are actively engaged in transmitting Indigenous sacred knowledge as found in the Maya calendar. A participant shared how this knowledge can help people analyze violence as a direct result of this imbalance. In his opinion:

A través del calendario Maya hay roles definidos, hay funciones definidas. En la calle puedes ver machismo, pero no estás dentro de la casa para ver realmente lo que se está viviendo en una casa. El hombre machista, desde mi punto de vista trata de demostrar lo que no es. Yo he llegado a esta conclusión. El machista va a tratar de evidenciar que es macho porque de repente no ha tenido la oportunidad o la libertad de identificarse no como macho sino que como un hombre como tal, con sus libertades y también con sus limitantes.

Through the Maya calendar we can see each person has a function, a role … you may think you see machismo on the streets but you are not inside peoples’ homes to see what is really happening. …When you see a couple on the street and the man walks in front of the woman it does not mean that she does not make decisions at home. This has more to do with trying to find balance in this combination of energies, a key concept in trying to find harmony in any situation. (Wuqub’ Iq’, May 24, 2007)

Wuqub’ Iq’s statement is an important reminder that some non-Western practices of the male walking ahead when breaking a trail in rural areas where the grasses and shrubs obstruct one’s path can be interpreted as overprotective and sexist by virtue of the male being in the
forefront. That this pattern of walking has been transferred to city streets, where dangers also linger, simply implies a different way of thinking about safety when walking in unknown terrain.

On this topic, I would like to once again cite Mohanty’s (2003) analysis of how the Western gaze focuses on public displays of social ordering that are evaluated against a set of Western values that have nothing to do with the reasoning behind the actions being witnessed. In other words, the interpretation of gender oppression is based solely on the values of “a colonial society that indeed oppresse[s] their women) (Hookimaw-Witt, 2006, p. 64). It is important to remember there are different understandings of codes of conduct, otherwise, we may misread behaviors.

Therefore, I posit, once again from the different perspective of the participants: that the role of education in this context is to teach future generations about the energies that each person and each day have, in order to learn how to balance them. The goal is not to be perfect, but to be aware of and wary in situations that are out of balance. For example, if a child is born under a spirit guide whose energy tends to be more self-centered, then it is imperative to pair this child with someone who is more sharing in order for them to learn to balance each other. The connection is made at home and at school so that all moments of life are learning moments:

La educación se daba dentro de la casa, alrededor del fuego, en donde la abuela y el abuelo también tomen parte de la educación de los niños, en donde la solidaridad era importante y era lo que sostenía a las comunidades. En cambio ahora ya no se siente el sentido de comunidad sino que eso se ha perdido.

Education was provided inside each person’s home, around the fire, where the grandmother and grandfather also shared their stories and where solidarity was important, it grounded communities. But now, we no longer feel the sense of community and this has now been lost. (María Morales Jorge, June 19, 2007)

Community work is another pedagogical approach. One of the recommendations from María, as illustrated above, is to combine agricultural work with what children learn about the Maya calendar in school. As María Morales stated, “nowadays, children get their vacation in June and during this month, there is no work on the fields. Therefore, there is nothing for them to learn and do that is directly related to our culture. The timing is off. The school calendar should coincide with the Maya calendar so they can also learn from doing, with the azadón [hoe] in their hands.” Her analysis of the lack of relevance and respect for the way of life of the rural Maya in
the organization of the school year reflects the Eurocentric foundation upon which the current education system is built.

It is clear that the values and ways of living differ from rural to urban areas, and that not every child and Maya family has a piece of land and community to return to so they may put their knowledge about the calendar and agriculture into practice. However, the idea to pair children whose parents own land for agriculture with children whose parents do not would provide all with the opportunity to apply their knowledge. In turn, the value of cooperation and of building community through agricultural work during their vacation break could enhance Maya education. Could Maya Indigenous education, practiced in this way, address the erasure of values and culture that have resulted in a loss of balance?

One way to address this question is from the point of view that not one theory or position is universally applicable: each one has specificities and differences that must be negotiated, understood and discussed. For example, Maya Kaqchik’el scholar Rosa Pu Tunux has highlighted some of the basic differences between liberal feminism and the Maya woman-centered perspectives to which I refer in this dissertation. Table 1 outlines these differences.

Table 1

*Comparison of Woman-Centered Maya and Liberal Feminist Perspectives*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Maya woman-centered</th>
<th>Mainstream Western feminist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Holistic vision</td>
<td>Holistic vision embodied in everyday practice to strengthen Maya communities based on an understanding that complementarity is a step in becoming whole</td>
<td>Fragmented vision focused on discourse andtheory about the struggle for participation in male structures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trad. values</td>
<td>Traditional values seen from Western standpoints to be backward</td>
<td>“Modern” values seen from Western standpoints as the ideal to strive for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective vision</td>
<td>Collective vision based on the values of relationships, reciprocity, and interdependence</td>
<td>Individualist vision based on demands for integration into nation-states</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Although Table 1 is not comprehensive, it does provide general characteristics from each position. The intention is to highlight some of the tensions that exist between the two positions while also understanding that both are constructed from understandings and assumptions about the other in different contexts, time and space. I have already stated that no body of theory is monolithic nor static. I understand that feminism shifts and has made room for new discussions about the inherent power in naming and defining itself. My intention is not to delve into the specific evolution of each position because there are distinctions within each and cannot be simply reduced to a table. However, my intention is to provide a general overview of the issues that pose tensions in Guatemala and that need further debate between Indigenous and non-Indigenous women. The table also illustrates that Maya constructions of gender, based on a holistic vision of becoming a balanced and complete being, could provide a platform from which to engage feminisms in such a way that both would retain their integrity and spaces, not be brought into competition with each other. Departing from this type of knowledge into the education system is one of the goals of the MPER.

Documents produced by CNEM throughout the reform process illustrate a variety of exercises that could be used to transmit Indigenous teachings in a community setting by engaging students with Elders and other community knowledge keepers (CNEM, 2004). Likewise, the objectives of the New National Base Curriculum address this point in its effort “to reflect and respond to the characteristics, needs and hopes of a multicultural, multilingual and multiethnic nation, through developing respect, strength and fostering the personal and collective identities of its Peoples as the foundation for unity in diversity” (MINEDUC, 2005, p. 5). In keeping with this objective, there is a component that teaches about gender, gender relations, and equity in the context of developing equitable social relations between different ethnic groups, genders, and classes. This objective reflects the educational component of the United Nations Millennium Goals (UNDP 2011) in that it focuses on transforming the curriculum to improve the quality of education based on the foundational principles of “equity, belonging, sustainability, social commitment and participation and pluralism” (p. 10) in order to achieve universal primary education. It is clear that the language and goals of these educational reforms utilize a Western framework for understanding different groups and the social relations that govern them, without addressing how colonial history, its institutions and, more importantly, its underlying assumptions and values that still permeate the national imaginary of the country are implicated in
fostering unequal relations amongst diverse groups. Moreover, the teaching of gender equity, which is done within a humans rights discourse, with an emphasis on capital gains, economic productivity and independence, fails to address Indigenous views on development, equity, and self-sufficiency.

While the above reforms suggest that there is the political will to transform unequal power relations within society by highlighting the contributions and applications of Indigenous Maya knowledge, the words ring hollow since the government has, to this day, not allocated appropriate budgets for the infrastructure (particularly in rural communities), staff training, and educational materials needed to support this decentralized model of education (Pedro Us, 2007). And another participant corroborated that intercultural and bilingual education, as it stands today, presents a fragmented and out-of-context version of MIE. The elements added to the current curriculum only include certain values and teachings from Maya culture. This particular form of inclusive education is additive. And yet, participants recognize its potential as a strategy to begin transforming education so it is no longer a site of rejection of Indigenous knowledge and languages. However, as in the case of teacher education in Peru (Trapnell, 2003), tensions arise when government fails to commit an adequate budget to not only reform the current school system, but also to inject resources into bilingual intercultural education (Freeland, 1996).

Framing Indigenous knowledge or any knowledge in rhetoric fails to provide the connections necessary to change perceptions about contemporary Maya peoples and their contributions to society. This disconnected approach to teaching and learning counters the ultimate goal of decolonizing education. Current efforts to include Maya knowledge or aspects of MIE within education reform are not enough. Teaching and learning Indigenous knowledge also requires an experiential component so that students can practice what they learn, rather than merely focusing on the written word.

Further, current reforms still carry a sense that inequality between women and men is a cultural and social phenomenon. Again, I reiterate that this liberal view of violence against women does not consider the impact of structural colonization and thus, fails to address the need to dismantle colonial structures of governance and social organization. Therefore, while it is necessary to address domestic violence in Maya culture, it is just as important to address
systemic violence. These are connected and are symptoms of colonization and market economies that base their value systems solely on monetary exchanges and economic contributions rather than a more holistic view of societies:

I believe that the gender issue, well I believe the word itself is a bit hard to understand from our own way of being because, along with all of the impositions and the history we have lived, many of us are already a part of that [Western] world. But I believe that in the end, what we are all looking for is to respect the other half of humanity because we are roughly 50% women and 50% men. The issue is that we, men, have to understand that the other half complements us, and if we did, many issues would be resolved. And also, the other half [women] also needs to value itself, to understand that she is a person, just like the man … simply another being. I think that it is valuable to address this issue from another position, and if we address it from our position as Maya people then it is very important because not many people do so. And even more so, because the trend is that many of our sisters are now joining the side that is more willing to fight and do unto us men what we have done to them. (José Yac Noj, May 12, 2007)

The challenge is to realize that imbalance is not part of our culture, whether we are men or women. The goal is to understand that no man or woman is worth more than the other. For this understanding to come about, we have to bring the different perspectives together and go
into communities to speak to Elders and decide how to approach this theme. In the next section I discuss some directions that the participants suggested might help decide how to approach the subject and under what terminology. Although this is part of a broader project, the ideas might provide other researchers and academics with ideas about how to put their research to work for the communities that are providing information so that they may advance in their studies or work.

**Pedagogical Implications of Indigenous Knowledge**

Indigenous knowledge provides an example of a philosophy that moves away from individual and universal rights-based forms of education and works toward a collective and specific Indigenous education. The women that participated in this study share the goal of providing access and quality education to younger generations. Their positions on making alliances with the feminist movement vary according to whether they work in institutional or communal spaces. I want to clarify that when I speak of community, I speak of it with the understanding that *communal* well-being and interactions as exemplified through our Maya values takes precedence over the concept of *community* espoused by international development rhetoric. This distinction is necessary because, as is often the case with many communities, community work is funded by international development agencies and thus is somewhat transformed by their requirements. Therefore, the community work I refer to happens at a collective level, imbued with the sense of a shared struggle to find solutions. On this point, research by FRMT and UNESCO (1997) goes further to illustrate through their interviews that Indigenous peoples that life in their communities develops around a deep sense of community, “expressed in their communal, recreational, spiritual, agricultural, labor-related activities as well as in their relationships with their neighbours: but they have changed due to individualist, competitive and monetary attitudes and values” (p. 90).

The Maya men who participated in the study expressed a clear opposition to engagement with feminists in Guatemala and look down upon Indigenous women who declare themselves to be feminists. I also want to state that not all Indigenous women who ascribe to or support feminist ideals base their philosophical centering on the Maya concept of *Jun Winaq*. Most Indigenous women focus on the concept of *kabawil*, or the “double gaze.” I posit here that
 kabawil is part of the process of Jun Winaq’, it provides the process with an element of introspection to consider all implications of a particular situation.

An example of how kabawil functions in this dissertation and in my own life is in the realization that, in order to walk the path of healing, I cannot ignore the implications of ascribing to either a feminist or nonfeminist position. I echo some participants’ belief that it is not a matter of labeling oneself as one or the other. This dichotomy only serves to divide our goals as Indigenous peoples focused on healing, and further, creates fertile ground for the nation-state to manipulate both sides (A. Smith, 2008). On the one hand, I concur with Sandy Grande’s (2003) analysis regarding western and Whitestream feminism’s lack of praxis for embracing and engaging diverse lived experiences and different forms of theorizing. In other words, the extent to which the claim that feminisms are fluid and open to accept various forms of theorizing needs to be analyzed (Davis, 1981; hooks, 1984, 1988; Lorde, 1981; Mohanty, 2003; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981; Wane, 2006). Black feminists, women of color and Indigenous women have felt the brunt of being excluded from feminist debates by virtue of their centering their theorizing and language on lived experience and not on academic texts. bell hooks (1984), declares that “unlike earlier forms of feminist theory, the contemporary production of feminist theory is sequestered behind the ivy walls of academia, where the growing social distance between whitestream academics and the lived experiences of ‘real world’ women has enabled ‘high status feminists’ to build lucrative careers by theorizing the lives of ‘other’ women—a situation that replicates the relation between colonizer and colonized” (hooks, as cited in Grande, 2003, p. 331). But, why do feminisms, even the most progressive and inclusive streams, tend to replicate the dominating language of academia to analyze the intersections of power? Is this the only approach to theorizing and reflecting upon inequity? I would like to propose that, while it may be possible to decolonize language and theory in some instances, the fact remains that certain bodies are punished or not taken seriously for speaking in a language about inequities and injustice without using academic jargon. I myself have fallen into this trap because, without the right words, this knowledge is not taken seriously.

The issue of language, definitions, and assumptions also arises in the context of speaking about the institutionalization of knowledge for education. For example, when I look back to analyze my own experience in academia and also in development settings, I can see how equity
is deemed to be another globalizing project with capitalist goals. I refer to the modern project of assimilation via the inclusion of Maya professionals and leaders in state and international development projects that, while providing economic mobility to those involved, create divisions in terms of epistemology, political goals, and class. This division often obscures the basic struggles for land, territory, and self-determination within education as well. In this sense, María Alicia Telón’s suggestion to re-center Maya Indigenous knowledge and concepts in an effort to move beyond a victimized dependency on nation-states is timely. She proposes that this would allow Indigenous peoples to define our own futures from the place of strengthening our identity as Maya and as women. At the same time, this endeavor necessitates the cooperation of Indigenous women and men, as well as non-Indigenous women and men. I elaborate further on this in Chapter 7, when I discuss the implications of Maya Indigenous Education on nation-building discourses that move beyond state-defined boundaries.

Another aspect of MIK that must be translated into both the pedagogical approach and content is the current cultural practices that allow a community to survive and thrive by itself. An example is the communal practice of the *kuchub’al*. The *kuchub’al* is a concept that centers collective work for the benefit of the community. This collective work includes organizing on a rotating basis, in exchange for communal work, various services including agricultural work, housework, caregiving, or construction. It also refers to the creation of a communal monetary fund to which all members contribute a small amount of money destined to be used for the community or individual in case of an emergency. The collective values transmitted through this approach to taking care of the community counter the individual and competitive nature of schooling at present. The use of the concept *kuchub’al* also provides an opportunity to move beyond pedagogical approaches that center universal and individual knowledge, memorization, regurgitation, individual gains and rewards, and an atmosphere of competition. Including contemporary collective practices in the curriculum, such as the *kuchub’al*, or collective and community work geared to improve or maintain a community, can counter the imbalance caused by globalization and market economies.

The practice of *kuchub’al*, still carried out today, allows communities to clean up, provide services and build infrastructure that the state does not provide without using money. For example, in my grandmother’s community bartering is still a means to get the things one does
not produce or have access to. When I visit her, she always asks me to go and see if her elderly neighbors have dirty laundry so we can wash it for them. In exchange, one of her neighbors comes to look after her house when my grandmother is away. Or she might ask me to go and ask to barter beans for corn or a chicken. In turn, another neighbor will do the same, and in times of hardship, especially for families where there are children and the husband is away, the opportunity to barter helps out. It is a way of life and a form of practicing respect and reciprocity. I remember my grandmother saying that the land is kind enough to give us her fruits, the least we can do is share it with others who may not have what we have. This teaching began at home when I visited my grandmother which goes to illustrate that education begins with one’s family and community:

La madre, el padre y los hermanos mayores son nuestros primeros educadores. Y entonces, si ellos son buenos educadores, logran de nosotros nuestra formación, que es la base de toda nuestra vida. Entonces creo que sí, hay que retomar—como ya le dije, que el sistema no lo hace—entonces, hay que retomar ese papel de educadores de la familia, y luego el papel de educadores de algunos actores de la comunidad.

The first teachers are the family. … Mother, father, sisters and brothers. … If they are good teachers, this is the foundation for life. Therefore, I believe that we need to reclaim—like I stated before—our role as educators within our families, and then with our own communities. (María Alicia Telón, March 6, 2007)

In this respect, Indigenous education defies the Western concept that education only happens in a school and teaching is only what is done by teachers teaching from books. The Maya epistemological position implies, “understanding that public and private spheres are all interconnected” (Ana Ventura, June 19, 2007). This means that the values learned and lived at home and outside the home are the same. Further, when I asked about the distinction between public and private spaces, I was told that private might mean something that you pay for, such as a private school, since there is no division between private and public in Maya languages (Ana Ventura, June 19, 2007). It is clear that the participant stories weave themselves from the center of community, where Grandmothers’ knowledge is carried and passed on so that members of the community understand each person exists in relation to each member of their family, community, region, nation, and the universe. This implies that the philosophical foundations
learned at school and at home are carried into daily life and practiced everywhere, to the best of one’s abilities. Although the study is based on a very small sample group, their stories of community involvement, my own experience growing up in Guatemala and observations made during my field work show a general agreement that the concepts of balance and interrelationship make the distinction between the goals of MIE and those of Western education very clear.

As stated earlier, there are examples of communities where Indigenous Maya women still hold important posts. María Alicia Telón shared that she is considered an Elder in her own community. She explained that people from her community come to her for advice, not only on personal matters, but also on legal, cultural and economic matters because of her professional and community service. Moreover, the practice of having women in traditional councils has been reclaimed, and in 2005, the first Indigenous woman mayor was elected in the city center of Sololá, a Kaqchikel speaking Maya community. The election of a woman to the traditional Elders council in Sololá, and the practice of electing community mayors who resolve matters based on Indigenous rights and customary law, as is the case of one participant, Cristina Coroxón, illustrate the reclamation and practice of traditional forms of governance and social organization. The increasing public participation of Maya women in a variety of posts shows that Maya women are actively reclaiming and occupying seats that have been traditionally occupied by women. It also shows that Indigenous Maya men are looking deep into their values and living what they preach. The efforts to construct MIE are not only to promote Indigenous rights, culture, values and languages; they are also to bring back the balance between women and men. However, there is still much work to do and many who have yet to tap into this knowledge (María Alicia Telón, March 6, 2010). And this is where MIE can serve as a catalyst to help us remember the knowledge we carry. María Morales explains that she believes she carries the strength of Maya women leaders from the past in her blood, or what Holmes (2000) refers to as “blood memory”:

Creo que algo trae uno en la sangre y esta es la historia de las mujeres Mayas porque ellas siempre fueron activas y siempre participaban. Hubo un tiempo en el cual ellas también dirigían gobiernos y grandes proyectos entonces en la sangre de nuestras abuelas estaba el gobernar y dirigir. Yo diría que lo traigo en la sangre por un lado y por otro lado creo que es resultado de todo lo que hicieron mis
papás a nivel espiritual por mí porque después, muchos años después cuando yo ya sabía leer y escribir, empezó más el trabajo con las mujeres.

I believe that we carry this knowledge in our blood and this is our story as Maya Grandmothers were always actively involved [in community affairs]. There was a time when they also held positions of power in government and so, this only reaffirms that governing was in our Grandmother’s blood. I would say that I carry this gift in my blood and also, my desire to participate and change women’s lives comes from the efforts my parents did at a spiritual level [so I could be ok …] because many years after that, when I learned how to read and write [in Spanish] my work with [Indigenous] women increased. (Maria Morales Jorge, June 19, 2007)

Spirituality and the sense of the interdependence of family, community, and outwards is an epistemological position embedded in Indigenous knowledge. MIE offers approaches to tap into this knowledge through learning from the sacred lunar calendar, the Tzolk’in. Pedro Us, a participant who is also an Ajq’ij, reminded me during our conversation that ceremonies are means to “understand different realities … it is not a question of faith alone, but rather deepening knowledge through this practice and thus learning how to best use our abilities to benefit our communities” (Pedro Us, January 14, 2008).

**Future Directions for Ancestral Knowledge in Indigenous Education**

Regardless of its origins in Native communities, then, sexism operates with full force today and requires strategies that directly address it. Before Native peoples fight for the future of their nations, they must ask themselves, who is included in the nation? It is often the case that gender justice is often articulated as being a separate issue from issues of survival for Indigenous peoples. Such an understanding presupposes that we could actually decolonize without addressing sexism, which ignores the fact that it has been precisely through gender violence that we have lost our lands in the first place. (A. Smith, 2005, p. 116)

This idea emerges from various studies done about Indigenous women in which their “triple oppression,” as women, as Indigenous, and as poor, is the object of analysis, discussion, and the demonization of Indigenous culture. I would like to end this Chapter with a story about how Western constructions of gender equality and equity are aspirations and not really lived
experiences. María Alicia Telón reflects on this point and provides a set of issues to think about when imposing gender analyses and ways of categorizing the social relations between women and men in Maya culture. She explains that both the Maya Indigenous and the Western feminist theories are aspirations. Therefore, for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous women, the challenge is to work across differences, and make room for multiple knowledges and ways of theorizing (Archuleta, 2006). María Alicia Telón describes her position:

Yo se que la perspectiva de género busca la igualdad y la equidad. Y qué bueno. Pero no es lo que existe, pero es lo que se pretende. Y, ¿cómo se analiza esta situación de la desigualdad para pretender a la forma ideal? Entonces casi lo mismo pasa con lo de etnia. Entonces algunos señalan esos ejemplos y dicen que uno está idealizando a la cultura porque eso no funciona así. Y les digo yo que ninguna cultura es pura. Pero si uno va a esas comunidades que han tenido menos contacto con otras culturas, uno todavía puede ver esos aspectos en prácticas tan cotidianas, tan normales entre hombres y mujeres que yo sigo creyendo, y como le digo, que aunque aun no fuera así la realidad, les acepto que no es así la realidad, que es un ideal, pero entonces hay que mantenerlo como un ideal a alcanzar. Pero, como si hay, yo les digo que sí, efectivamente, existen los ejemplos, existen las vivencias. Entonces algún día vamos a teorizar esas vivencias y prácticas. … Entonces uno dice, ¿en qué momento dicen que nosotras no tuvimos un papel importante desde la creación?

I know that gender perspectives seek equity and equality. And this is very good, but it is not what we experience and live at this time. And so, how do we analyze it to bring it to our ideal? And the same is happening to the issue of ethnicity. Therefore, some scholars will point out our deficiencies and say that we are only idealizing our culture because in reality, it does not work that way. And so I tell these critics that no culture is pure, but if we visit communities that have had less contact with the outside world, we can still see living examples of this concept as normal and living practices between women and men, and, I still believe, that even if this were not true, if these practices were not actually lived today and were only an ideal, then we have to maintain this as an ideal to reach. But, because we do have living examples of these practices, then we have to theorize them and convert them into present day knowledge. … for example, our history as Maya peoples includes the important roles of women leaders who contributed to the history and development of our society. Therefore, we have to ask, when did we not play important roles in our society? (María Alicia Telón, March 6, 2007)
Maria Alicia Telon’s analysis highlights two issues. The first is the audacity of the mainstream approach to Western history as taught in most educational institutions. This pedagogy ignores the contributions of and the positive roles to be found in Maya culture. Indigenous cultures are demonized, and when they provide positive examples that could contribute to changing society for the better, they are conveniently ignored. The second is that even most Western feminist ideals are simply that: ideals. In this context why should Maya ideals be of less importance? Mainstream Western feminists argue that Maya ideals of womanhood and positionality are moot because these practices are no longer actively promoted or lived (MacLeod & Sneider, 2009). In reality, neither Whitestream feminists nor Indigenous women have been able to achieve their goals of equity in the sense of attaining complementarity so that both women and men can attain our goals. At present, both streams of thought and activism are working towards similar goals albeit using different lenses, concepts, and frameworks. To insist on the devaluation of Indigenous epistemologies only further fragments the movement towards gender equity and replicates the false demarcations and demonization of colonialism.

The earlier examples demonstrate that Maya communities still regard women as important members of society and they are reclaiming their traditional roles. These examples illustrate that women are organizing and taking ancestral teachings found in oral history, sacred books, and everyday life not only in order to contextualize the events that are affecting women today, but also to find alternative ways in which to share problems with different women across communities. This is done with the goal of finding solutions to the pressing issues of violence and imbalance based on colonial gender constructions. I concur with Annie Loomba (2005) that “The ‘complicity’ of individuals with ideological and social systems is not entirely a matter of their intentions” (p. 7). I also recognize that many a researcher with good intentions has fallen into the trap of becoming a “savior” to “helpless” Indigenous women who do not know that they are being abused and even less how to get out of their abusive situations. Because good intentions go awry, researchers and policy makers need to take into consideration the different contexts and solutions devised by women and men in Indigenous communities trying to bring balance and stop the cycle of violence that is so prevalent in the world and not only in the Indigenous world.
Further Thoughts

Making Ancestral Knowledge (AK) central in education is an important aspect of the MPER. However, unlike Western education in which knowledge is divided into subject areas, AK is a theme that cuts across all aspects of life. On the one hand, some participants shared that it is important to highlight it on its own and give it space to be taught. Some of the female participants even agreed that it may not be a bad idea to teach gender studies to gain some useful tools to apply to Indigenous women’s analyses of their oppressions because we are already submerged in Western concepts and practices. The contradictions between gender studies and AK allude to the tensions created when Indigenous and non-Indigenous standpoints collide. But, Cleotilde Vásquez pointed out that the recurring speaking of the Jun Winaq’ or “Complete Being” could be a way to address gender issues from our culture. María Alicia Telón, who also supports this position, highlighted the importance of learning Western theoretical tools that can be used to support Indigenous women who face violence and whose communities are afflicted by the remnants of colonization and war. Cleotilde Vásquez summed up some of the general perspectives the participants discussed regarding the need to find a concept that comes from Maya languages and still grounds practice today:

El planteamiento occidental lo hemos asumido. Por más que hacemos esfuerzos por descolonizarnos, estamos rodeados de un contexto en donde el día a día nos está consumiendo. Y abordando sobre el planteamiento de género es bastante profundo porque creo que el compañero fue muy acertado porque en nuestro idioma no nos hacemos bolas y debemos de reconceptualizarlo desde el idioma para tener un norte y dentro de la educación para que sea viable. Esto se da desde los abuelos, desde la forma de comportarnos, como cuidar nuestro cuerpo por ejemplo, incluso el hecho de ser una madre hay muchos consejos que se le dan a uno… tiene toda una carga de educación que va para conservar la vida y no violentarla. Y cuando entramos en el mundo occidental y hablamos de género es un poco complejo porque igual una persona decía que es, para mí no tiene significado… ¿es un pedazo de tela? Porque así se le llama en mi comunidad. Y creo que esa parte como que nos tiene un poco confundidos y sobre todo en las comunidades en donde no se da este tipo de debates. Sin embargo, no podemos idealizar porque por supuesto que hay una filosofía rica desde nuestros abuelos pero que hoy por hoy se ha perdido mucho los valores, por la situación que se está viviendo, el mismo contexto en el cual nos desenvolvemos entonces es válido ir
retomando esos elementos que aun están allí en la práctica. Hay cosas tan sencillas con las cuales tenemos roces con nuestras compañeras feministas, bueno dicen que solo el hecho que el hombre va adelante es un signo que el hombre es machista pero cuando vemos en las comunidades que los esposos igual cargan y cuidan a sus bebes y van adelante es porque quieren que el camino no sea un peligro, porque en el monte salen culebras entonces hay una esencia en la práctica y en la cotidianidad que no le hemos redimensionado y recreado porque esto es parte del conocimiento y por eso está dentro de las comunidades. Creo que el reto es ir sistematizando este tipo de filosofía que está ahí…. Entonces como conceptualizamos género creo que está en discusión y de pronto se puede ir redimensionando porque … hay que ser más proactivos desde una educación que reconstruya y que realmente ayude a valorar a la persona como el [Jun] Winag’. Entonces esa parte es un reto y es un reto que por supuesto desde lo que no está escrito entonces está afuera pero si ya lo escribimos entonces el aporte sería que el género no es tal desde la cosmovisión y tendría que tener un nombre Maya pero en qué idioma, pero tendríamos que tener un punto en común y estas son las eternas discusiones porque siempre lo hemos discutido pero a otro nivel.

We have accepted the Western concepts because, as hard as we try to decolonize our minds, we are immersed in a context that consumes us day after day. And I concur with our colleague in the sense that we need to come up with a concept that comes from our culture and language because this is how we illustrate that we do not complicate things in regards to gender … this would serve as a guiding principle regarding how to address this issue in education. This concept would be based on our ancestors’ knowledge, our way of acting, for example in how we take care of our bodies, and also in how we take care of our children because there is much advice we are given around that theme … this all has to do with an education that fosters life and does not violate it. And so when we enter into the Western world and we discuss gender, then it becomes more complicated because many people do not understand its meaning … [Women ask me:] Is that the name of a piece of fabric? [Because] this is [what gender] means in our language. And these debates are not taking place in our communities. And so people do not understand what we mean by it. But we cannot idealize these philosophical concepts that come from our ancestors because they are not practiced today. We have lost our values because of our current situation and what we face each day. But because of the work we do, it makes sense to reclaim the aspects of our culture that are still practiced. There are examples of how we diverge from our feminist comrades, for example, just because a man may walk in front of a
woman and her baby they assume he is sexist. But when we go to the communities and witness how men also carry and take care of the babies we can see that [they walk ahead of the women and babies] because they want to ensure the path is safe and there are no snakes or other animals that might endanger them. ... Therefore, I think it is important to recognize that how we conceptualize gender is still in the early stages of discussion and perhaps we can orient it towards building an education that builds on the concept of the [Jun] Winaq’. And this is a challenge because not only are we still conceptualizing it, we have yet to write it. And if this conversation we are having is our contribution to this debate, then we should include it as such. (Cleotilde Vásquez, Workshop, January 30, 2008)

The need to appropriate Western concepts and find terms that we can reconstruct from our own understandings highlights the danger that, once we propose terms to replace Western ones like gender, we might not be able to engage in discussions without being lost in translation. How can we engage with these terms by appropriating them and making them our own without embracing values and ways of being that are not ours? These concerns suggest the need to look at the fluidity of Indigenous and non-Indigenous epistemologies in order to avoid un/intentionally replicating the separation between women’s and men’s knowledge. If Indigenous women’s experiences are separated from men’s experiences in such a way that we do not take both into account, are we subverting the original Maya ideals of complementarity and balance?

Almost all participants agreed that omitting men’s voices and opinions on gender and feminism for the sake of giving space to women’s voices is something that lacks balance. Because balance and wholeness are intrinsic in Maya epistemology and axiology, both voices need to be present. But I do not think that this tension will come to a resolution through adherence to either position regarding gender construction. After all, no system of knowledge exists in a vacuum (Dei, 2008, 2011). What needs to happen is that spirituality and the characteristics that unite all beings be centered. This should be the challenge: to address injustices and imbalance that resonate with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous positions. In the next Chapter, I discuss the implications of articulating spirituality within the discussion of MIE. I also discuss the importance of passing traditional leadership on to future generations in order to
ensure leaders are chosen based on their trajectory, knowledge, wisdom, and also the gifts given to them by Creator.
Introduction

In this Chapter I discuss another foundational element of Maya Indigenous Education (MIE): the observance of the sacred *Tzolk’ín*, or lunar calendar. It grounds the metaphysical and gendered dimensions of Indigenous Maya knowledge in its discussion about the role of the *Tzolk’ín* in education. I posit that the Maya Calendar is a tool for reclaiming ancient forms of education and defining leadership. I demonstrate that Indigenous education, with its focus on spirituality, has the potential to foster a new kind of leadership and citizens. These Indigenous citizens can build a new nation for all the peoples in Guatemala.

I base the analysis on the stories of the participants regarding their engagement with the *Tzolk’ín* in relation to the elements that have been proposed in the Maya Proposals for Education Reform (MPER) as evidenced in the literature. In doing this, I want to illustrate the relevance of Maya cultural practices, such as ceremony, to education and their possible applications. Specifically, I want to further illustrate how *Jun Winaq’* is also useful in understanding the role
of MIK in guiding the participants on their personal and professional paths. Through the stories, I reiterate that the process of Jun Winaq’ is deeply entrenched in their lives. Taking a decolonizing and critical approach to understanding educational processes, I also illustrate the tensions and possibilities of engagement with Elders and ceremony as vehicles to pass on ancient knowledge about each person's traits, gifts and abilities based on the Tzolk’in to younger generations. I argue throughout that if the objective of education is to build confident and whole members of society, then MIE is only one example of the possibility for all cultures to remember, reclaim and apply their own concepts in their search for, and creation of effective leaders. In other words, a possible application of the Tzolk’in is to choose responsible leadership. For this to happen, MIE needs reclaim and apply MIK to contemporary issues.

The Maya Tzolk’in Calendar: Aspects relevant to education

Indigenous Maya peoples, like other Indigenous groups, center spiritual practices like ceremony to access, understand, and share knowledge (Battiste, 1986, 1998; Cajete, 1994; Castellano, 2000; Dei, Hall & Rosenberg, 2000; Ermine, 1995; Iseke-Barnes, 2003; Mazama, 2002; L. T. Smith, 1999, 2005; Wane, 2006, 2011a, 2011b; Wane & Ritskes, 2011). Scholars in Canada, United States, and New Zealand have devoted enormous amounts of time and effort to discussing spirituality in teacher training (see Cajete, 1994; Dei, Hall & Rosenberg, 2000) and transformative and higher learning (Dei, 2002; Shahjahan, 2004, 2005; Wane, 2006), and more recently, to transformative educational processes (Wane, Mayaimo & Ritskes, 2011). However, the growing literature about centering Indigenous spiritual practices in educational settings leaves the possibilities of including spiritual practices in educational settings less than fully explored. Except for some scholars whose work highlights the pedagogical implications of centering their culturally and epistemologically grounded spiritualities in education (see, for example, Graveline, 1998, 2001, 2002; hooks, 2003; Iseke, 2010, 2011; Iseke-Barnes, 2003) and its use as an anticolonial approach to our daily lives (Mazama, 2002), the literature pertaining to the application of spirituality to pedagogy or including it as part of curriculum is not addressed. In other words, the issue of spirituality has, in recent years, mostly been written about in documents that narrate its elements and characteristics as separate from its role in transformative, anticolonial, and Indigenized education.
The diverse positions regarding the inclusion of spirituality in formal education reflects the current debates in Guatemala, particularly with the group of participants in this dissertation, regarding its transformative role and spaces in which to further develop it and safeguard it. It is my intention to address not the debates but rather, the transformative possibilities for including it to guide education and pedagogy. In short, I understand the contentions regarding the inclusion and exclusion of such an intrinsic aspect of Maya Indigenous knowledge. The participants’ stories highlight the significance of valuing Maya spirituality and ceremony through the use of the Maya Tzolk’in calendar. In light of the recent attempts to systematically erase these Maya Indigenous ceremonial practices, particularly during the 1980s, when the civil war conflict peaked, it is fitting to say that including it in this document is an act of resistance against the negative stereotypes that exist regarding Maya spirituality.

Except for some notable mentions, such as the work of the National Council for Maya Education, where spirituality is discussed as a central aspect of teaching and learning (2004, 2007), there are few works that specifically discuss the pedagogical implications of using the Maya Tzolk’in as a guide in education (Alvarado & Coz, 2003; Sac Coyoy, 1999; Vásquez, 2003). This Chapter contributes to this body of literature and specifically the literature about centering Indigenous spiritual practices in transformative education inside and outside of the current state-sponsored system. Surely, as Vizenor (1998) has eloquently stated, reclaiming and reimagining Indigenous ways of being is about more than just “survival, endurance, or a mere response to colonization, [as it moves] toward an active presence, and active repudiation of dominance, tragedy and victimry [sic]” (as cited in Grande, 2004, p. 175). This act of making power (A. Smith, 2008) is directly supported by Indigenous spiritual practices and the potential they hold to heal Indigenous peoples from the wounds of colonization. It is a liberatory process that is inherently anticolonial in the sense that it seeks freedom from all forms of oppression that obstruct Indigenous peoples’ creativity.

This research has found that becoming whole again, in the context of the participants’ lives, requires reclaiming and living Maya values and philosophy. But, how can Indigenous Maya communities reclaim something that is not allowed to flourish in the context of deeply entrenched colonial ideas found in educational, religious and even political institutions? Can Maya Indigenous education foster this waking up in future given the exclusion Maya Indigenous
knowledge from the current education system? In this section, I propose that for recovering and strengthening Maya cultural practices, it is necessary to resort to the tools our ancestors developed to archive, understand, and share knowledge about the cosmos. An example is the study and application of the *Tzolk'in*, the sacred Maya lunar calendar. The *Tzolk'in* is a repository of knowledge that combines the knowledge of astronomy in order to determine sacred days and celebrations. The participants agreed that it is an appropriate pedagogical tool to use in Maya education.

The participants shared unique stories about the ways in which they engage the teachings of the *Tzolk'in* in their daily lives. As one of 12 calendars developed by the ancient Maya (Vásquez, 2003), the *Tzolk'in* is based on a cycle of 260 days. The calendar follows the time the moon takes to travel around the Earth. It is important to note as well that 260 days is also the gestation time for a human being. This simple and yet, complex relationship illustrates the manner in which the *Tzolk'in* profoundly connects spirituality, science, medicine, mathematics, and education. It also makes evident that Maya epistemology recognizes the interconnection of nature and the universe. The relationships observed in nature are also the relationships that guide human existence. These relationships also reflect Castellano’s (2000) observation that Indigenous knowledges and their contemporary applications are fluid and can adapt to changing contexts (p. 23).

The centrality of ceremony in the observation and creation of knowledge about the cosmos is evident in the process of studying and creating knowledge about science. As a subject that has been used to justify European superiority due to its claims to objectivity and its secular and atomized nature, reclaiming the *Tzolk'in*, its teachings and foundations, illustrates that the assumption that science is a European endeavor is a myth. Demonstrated by the use of the *Tzolk'in*, it is clear that science is the foundation for Maya epistemology and philosophy. Bringing its teachings and concepts into education as curriculum or to inform pedagogical approaches illustrates that, as Njoki Wane (2011b) posits, MIK is both a philosophy and a research tool (p. 67). The participants stated that following the teachings and the calendar to guide their activities often leads them to make the best decisions. This is an example of how they ground their spirituality in culturally relevant practices that assist each of them in their daily lives.
As explained in Chapter 4, the Maya concept of the Ceiba is a tool through which the similarities in ethics and way of life become evident. Through this research, I found convergences with the participants in the sense that these values and ethics inform my scholarship and everyday life, as it does the participants’. The concepts and values that unite the participants and myself are guided by our struggle to respectfully share Maya Indigenous knowledge, and simultaneously safeguard it from being appropriated. The importance of protecting Indigenous knowledge (Battiste, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c; L. T. Smith, 1999) is due to a long history of Euro-American and Western appropriation and silencing of Indigenous voices and philosophies. Appropriation of this knowledge—and its subsequently repackaging it as Euro-American and Western knowledge—is a well-known practice that is part of the process of establishing Eurocentrism (Amin, 1989). The process of colonizing knowledges has created a separation between metaphysical and material pedagogical practices and knowledge found in education, with the consequence that science no longer acknowledges its relationship and application to spirituality and a hierarchy of knowledges is created. As Hurtado (2003) has stated, “it is challenging to incorporate spirituality in the academy and furthermore, to see what the benefits would be” (as cited in Shahjahan, 2005, p. 295). In this section I demonstrate the benefits and also the challenges of centering the Tzolk’in as part of Maya Indigenous Education (MIE).

As the literature regarding Indigenous Maya spirituality in educational settings reflects, it is no small feat to attempt to validate Indigenous knowledge in Ixim Ulew (Guatemala). Could sharing and applying this knowledge help society in general transform and heal? I cannot claim that Indigenous teachings in general or Maya in particular are a panacea for the problems and injustices of the current state of affairs. However, the participants at least agree that it does represent another valid choice to make in order to attain healing of the wounds inflicted by colonization and its violence. Healing is a powerful tool as it makes stronger spirits and stronger nations. Therefore, it is no coincidence that since contact, the colonizers have tried incessantly to both destroy Indigenous knowledge and simultaneously appropriate it (Vásquez, 2003).

The trend to appropriate and repackage knowledge is visible at present through the resurgence of studies on Maya spirituality by both scholars and New Age enthusiasts interested in satisfying their curiosity and exploring fears about the “end of the world” in 2012. Western
intellectual allies, such as David Carey Jr. (2011), have written about this appropriation of cultural knowledge and illustrated how Maya peoples have historically adapted to this thirst for knowledge by satisfying foreigners’ curiosity and desire for Maya culture through performance. This response illustrates a certain protagonism in history through the definition of an agenda that benefits Maya people—often at a personal level. In other words, Maya peoples have learned to both resist and use the desire of non-Indigenous and non-Maya by satisfying their demand to learn about Maya culture. The balancing act that is required to share Indigenous knowledge while protecting it from misuse is also an important dimension of applying Indigenous knowledge in non-Indigenous settings (Battiste, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c). L. T. Smith (1999, 2005) reminds researchers that while it is important to bring Indigenous knowledge and communities into educational and research spaces, it is also true that Indigenous knowledge is increasingly being commodified into what has been coined as “knowledge economies” (L. T. Smith, 2005, 93).

One particularly relevant and present example that I have observed is the fervor to learn more about the “end of the Maya cycle” in 2012. There are many spiritual guides or Ajq’ijab, as well as scholars, and companies who market the Maya to make profit. All of these actors will readily give a presentation about this event. This example illustrates one way in which Maya people—like any other individuals—will seize opportunities to benefit (often economically) from sharing some of their knowledge. It also illustrates the ethic that comes from understanding our rights and responsibilities as Maya peoples through sharing only part of the knowledge. In this sense, Indigenous Maya knowledge is safeguarded to be passed down to future generations in local communities and through educational settings.

By tracing the foundational elements of Maya science and mathematics, it becomes apparent that spirituality and science work in synergy as an act of awareness of all of the elements necessary to produce knowledge. In other words, the intellect and the spirit are not two opposing forces: they depend on each other to bring balance into our lives and in our relationship to the universe. The study of spirituality, in this context, does not “reject logic or reason [but rather rejects] the privileged position that it is given; it is a call for the inclusion of love, hope, respect, diversity, peace, community and humor—the things that make us whole” (Wane & Ritskes, 2011, p. xvi).
As Edgar Choguaj stated, quoted at the beginning of this Chapter, if the election of leaders would once again rely on the knowledge and wisdom found in the Tzolk’in, perhaps communities would have different leadership. In other words, proponents of traditional leadership see the danger in electing leaders based on various political tactics (for example, bribes and coercion) similar to those used by non-Indigenous politicians. Often, in these instances, the leaders propose a model of governance that is traditional but not Maya.15 This contradiction reaffirms my earlier caveat in Chapter 5 about traditions. What has been established as a tradition in colonial times, in this case, the process of electing traditional leadership, is not necessarily informed by Maya knowledge. To avoid government based on the tactics described above, traditional governance as prescribed by the ancient Maya protocols of electing leadership needs to be restored. As Denetdale suggests (2006), it is important to question whether sovereignty and Indigenous governance is structured upon the epistemological foundations of Indigenous worldviews and values. Education is a potential site for the passing on of this knowledge and for sifting out what is agreed does not belong to Maya leadership.

C. Dary, B. L. Asturias, V. M. Piedad and FLACSO (2004, p. 14) illustrated this distinction in their research in which it is noted that tradition does not always parallel Maya ancestral knowledge. Therefore, what we have today in some cases is a lack of awareness or a knowledge that is dormant and needs to be valued and reclaimed so that leaders do not take their positions for their personal benefit. Therefore, as a people, we need to build consensus around the Maya values found in our sacred books and oral stories and leaders who are aware of the differences between current traditions and Maya values. This debate needs to come to the fore if Maya Indigenous knowledge is to contribute to culturally appropriate and situated alternatives to addressing the problems faced in Guatemala. Although, once again, it is not a panacea, it can offer other standpoints from which to look at issues and people. Yac Noj and Choguaj illustrate the possible applications and tensions about Indigenous Maya knowledge as embedded in the Tzolk’in.

15 For further discussion of these tensions, see Aura Cumes and Santiago Bastos (2007) Mayanización y vida cotidiana: la ideología multicultural en la sociedad Guatemalteca, Volume I. Guatemala: Cholsamaj, particularly.
Some applications of the Tzolk’in in education

Although I did not originally intend to address the theme of the Indigenous knowledge and spiritual practices found in the Tzolk’in, the theme emerged as the participants proposed that its application to education for Indigenous students brings forth issues regarding the foundations of education. Using the values in the Tzolk’in as a way to frame the engagement of different knowledge systems in education is timely in Guatemala. As a theme for this dissertation, the discussions with the participants increasingly pointed to the importance of reclaiming this knowledge and also to disprove the general stereotype that Indigenous spirituality is witchcraft (Yac Noj, 2006; Us 2008). Moreover, as I myself became immersed in a process of revitalizing my Maya Indigenous knowledge through ceremony, I became more aware of its importance and centrality in Maya culture. In addition, more than half of the participants have the role of spiritual guide, or Ajqiq’ab. Thus, discussing the (albeit, general characteristics of) Tzolk’in, the Maya lunar calendar, points to the central elements proposed in MIE. In particular, this discussion responds to the imposition of Eurocentric notions of spirituality, specifically through Catholicism and, more so, through Christian evangelism. Further, the importance of the Tzolk’in makes the connection between human beings and the cosmos more evident. This relationship is exemplified during ceremony. In my experience, the Ajqiq’ab always explained that the number 20 also alludes to our body, as it is the sum of all of our toes and fingers. There are also references made to the 13 levels that exist in Maya cosmogony. A final thought on this is the proposition that the concept of the complete being or Jun Winaq’ is the manifestation of this unity: it literally means 20 in Maya K’ich’e. It is illustrated by a figure that resembles the infinity sign, and it means “wholeness.” This analysis justifies and makes visible the use and importance of the Jun Winaq’ as illustrated through the Tzolk’in in Maya Indigenous Education. I will now explain some of these aspects are in general terms as is appropriate when sharing Maya Indigenous knowledge with non-Maya people.

Indigenous Maya Knowledge in the Tzolk’in

The Tzolk’in is a repository of Indigenous Maya knowledge. Since time immemorial, Maya Grandmothers and Grandfathers have relied on it for a number of purposes. It is only one of many calendars that were created by the Maya ancestors (Yac Noj, May 12, 2007). Its study
and application illustrate the relationships between the movement of astral bodies and the success of certain events. For example, midwives use their knowledge of the *Tzolk’in* to help them in their practice. Moreover, the participants’ stories also provide evidence that midwives and healers are important actors within the culture. The knowledge these professionals embody is applied to take care of the community—from birth until death.

First, I discuss how the *Tzolk’in* directly affects traditional decision-making cycles, for example, communities choose leaders with the most appropriate *nawal* and later hold several consultations with spiritual guides and timekeepers, or *Aj quiq’ab*. The final decision is made after consultation with the community, which has to be certain that the person is able to fulfill the role and the responsibilities that come with it, for example, the person must have proven through example her or his commitment to community (Wuqub’ Kawoq, personal communication, 2008). Centering spirituality through the study of the *Tzolk’in* is therefore a natural inclusion in education given its current use and also because there is a lack of knowledge about it due to the history of colonization that relegated its use to paganism. The following is a description of its function and meaning for Maya peoples:

La vida del ser humano es comprensión y ejercicio cotidiano del cosmos y la naturaleza alrededor del calendario lunar. Cada día están fijados las prácticas, los contenidos, los valores, las virtudes, las potencialidades, el carácter y temperament del ser humano. Si no vivimos desde el calendario, es muy difícil entender las relaciones, el bienestar y prosperidad.

A human being’s life is based on understanding and the everyday praxis around the teachings of the lunar calendar. Each day marks a specific time for the practice, contents, values, and virtues, the potential and characteristics of a human being. If we do not live according to it, then it is very hard for us to understand the relations that engender wellness and prosperity. (Virginia Ajxup, July 2, 2007)

The above quote illustrates the value and function of the sacred *Tzolk’in*. By showing how the movement of the cosmos affects people, it also provides an inside look at the gifts a person is born with, which will guide them toward their particular path in life. Our ancestors passed on this knowledge in the form of oral stories and observations that took place in the home and in daily activities that connected knowledge of the physical and natural surroundings with
everything, from the naming of children, to agricultural practices and the recognition of the
natural gifts and abilities making a person suitable for a particular community role. This
particular form of social organization and traditional leadership centers spirituality through the
movement of the cosmos and with the guidance of the Tzolk’in. In practice, it illustrates an
anticolonial and Indigenizing approach to the political project of transforming education.

Traditional ways of passing down knowledge from generation to generation continue in
many communities and learning through example is the most effective and proven way children
learn:

Vale más el ejemplo que lo que uno dice, porque uno puede hablar muy bonito y
puede discursar, puede filosofar y puede decir muchas cosas, pero si no lo vive,
creo que eso es falso. Entonces, solo viviéndolo es como se enseña.

Our own example holds more meaning than our words, because one can speak
beautifully and say nice speeches, we can ponder and say many things, but if one
does not live by those words then it is all a facade. Therefore, we teach through
our living example. (José Yac Noj, May 12, 2007)

The above quote affirms that for Maya Indigenous peoples, teaching through example is the best
way to not only teach what is acceptable and not acceptable within the culture, it is also a way to
discover the value and worthiness of potential leaders. The personal trajectory and examples of
integrity and service to community, coupled with nawal helps a community and the Elders
decide who the next leaders will be.

**Choosing Leaders Through the Tzolk’in**

Yo, tengo este cargo ahora … no porque a uno le guste asumir o que quiera
estudiar para hacer eso. Sino que la misma comunidad a través de su energía
[nawal] porque saben que uno puede, la misma comunidad empuja a la persona a
tener que asumir. Porque uno siendo adulto, empieza uno a demostrar que uno es
autoridad porque uno orienta [a otros], porque uno guía, porque uno traza, porque
uno influye y porque uno confluye y porque uno aglutina [a la comunidad] bajo
un servicio comunitario. Cuando a la persona se ve como tal, la misma
comunidad, la misma sociedad le va dando a uno todos los poderes porque todos
vienen con un propósito positivo a solicitarle su ayuda. Entonces, uno va
formándose a través de lo que la gente le va dando a uno. Pero si uno en el momento dado no asume, también le falla a la comunidad… En este momento soy guía espiritual. En donde aplico el conocimiento de mis ancestros. … Esa es la autoridad que yo poseo actualmente y que yo … me he mejorado, en primer lugar. Me han hecho ser mejor, cambiar, para una vida de buen entendimiento.

I have that responsibility at this moment … this is despite the fact that one does not want to accept it, or if one does want to become one, that one can study for it. It is the community who decides through our energy [nawal] because they know we can, and so the community itself pressures one to accept the responsibility. This is because once we become adults, we begin to demonstrate through our actions that we are an authority because of our ability to guide [others], to intervene and unite [the community] under our service. When the community sees us as such, then the community itself gives us the ability to enact our function because they come to ask for help in a good way. Therefore, we learn through those gifts that people grant us, but also if we do not accept our responsibility, then we fail our community. … At this moment, I am a spiritual guide and timekeeper, so I apply the knowledge of the ancestors. This is the authority I hold and that has allowed me to walk in a good way and … these [factors] have made me a better person, I have changed so I can understand how to live a good life.

(José María Tol, March 1, 2007)

As José María Tol demonstrates, leaders are not elected through general elections as they are under a Western, democratic party system. Rather, prospective leaders need to show their trajectory and that they “walk in a good way.” That is, that they take their commitment to serve the community seriously. The Elders also predict this service when they are born through an examination of the energy or qualities and gifts they are born with under their nawal. The person who will become a leader has a very strong sense of connection to her or his territory, to the land and to their community. Becoming a spiritual guide and timekeeper only confirmed what he already knew in his heart and made him stronger.

In contrast, Virginia Ajxup shared her story, which highlights the importance of women in her family lineage from birth until she had to flee her community because of the internal armed conflict:
Mi madre me contó que me lo pronosticaron desde que nací, la comadrona dijo que me debería de llevar el nombre de la mujer que dio el origen al patrilinaje de los Ajxup, una mujer según lo que capte de todas las historias, de gran proyección y conocimiento; pero esto ya no fue aceptado porque mis padres ya estaban convertidos a la religión católica.

De grande me aclararon que mi nawal me solicitaba mi servicio. Pero que será eso, como decimos a lo desconocido se come o no se come. Me costó entender, le tenía un pánico, porque realmente no comprendía nada. Si lo que más daba vueltas en mi cabeza era la lectura de la Biblia, que por cierto lo había leído de pe a pa tres veces durante la misa y para no dormirme. Cuantos tropiezos, mis padres ya son catequistas ya no me educaron más desde esta sabiduría. La asimilación como profesional, cuan terrible era; me avergonzaba de mi pueblo, de mi identidad, pero tampoco me desenvolvía con seguridad desde los otros conocimientos, repetir, copiar, pero no crear. Copiar lo que viene de afuera, creyendo que son eso se resuelve los miedos, los temores, las inseguridades, con todo eso se convierte en cadena de traumas en la vida, es terrible. A esto le llamo trasplante. Le colocan a la persona en una maceta y luego te encajonan en otra para manifestar una imagen de la que no se sienta segura. Es terrible porque no se llega a realizar desde lo que crees, desde las cualidades, capacidades. Es una incertidumbre para consigo mismo y eso es muy doloroso; esta es la otra forma de hacer la guerra a los pueblos oprimidos. En mi búsqueda ya no entendía la cultura, ya no sabía más para que servía porque la descalificación es angustiosa, se aprendió a concebir que no servimos para nada, brutos, tontos, salvajes. Desde que yo pierdo mi idioma pierdo mi lógica K’iche’e y pierdo mis códigos que mi cultura tiene y para recuperarlo, lleva mucho tiempo.

My mother told me a story regarding how the midwife told her before I was born that I should carry the name of a strong woman who gave our family the Ajxup name. What I understood from all the stories I was told, is that it had to be a woman with great knowledge and insight into the future. But my parents did not want to accept this because they had already converted to the Catholic religion. And when I became older I was told that my nawal requested my service. But I did not understand and I was afraid because, in reality, I did not understand anything because what stood out most in my mind was the Bible—which, by the way, I had read from A to Z several times during mass so I would not fall asleep. My parents were preachers and so they did not educate me from our ancestral knowledge. At this time I was already a professional [teacher] and I was ashamed
of my nation, my identity, but interestingly I also did not feel comfortable in the other world, with their concepts focused on regurgitating facts, copying what comes from the other side, and never creating anything ourselves. I thought this was enough to stifle our fears, insecurities. … this is terrible because we do not succeed based on our own knowledge and what we believe about our abilities and gifts. … [During the time I searched for my identity,] I no longer understood our culture and I no longer knew how this knowledge would be useful because I learned that we [Mayas] are good for nothing, that we are dumb, savages. And from the moment I lost my language, I lost my K’ich’e’ logic and I also lost the markers and codes that I needed to retrieve it and so, it took me a long time to re-tap into it. (Virginia Ajxup, July 1, 2007)

In her story, Virginia shared how her identity suffered because of her parents’ conversion to Catholicism and the negative messages she received during her schooling. This experience is shared by many women, particularly those growing up during the internal armed conflict in Guatemala. This particular moment in history is complex, as the good intentions to literally save the Indigenous population from war also became a tactic to make Indigenous peoples into devout Catholics. The priests and nuns who believed in liberation theology did help many Indigenous women and men survive. Many survivors still recount how the Catholic Church was an ally during this period and some Mayas, like María Morales (June 19, 2007) did not seem to mind the conversion to Catholicism, especially if it provided them with security, food, and shelter. In Virginia’s story, however, the time came when she finally understood and accepted her responsibility as a Maya woman with the gifts to serve her people as Ajq’ij. According to her, this experience of accepting her responsibility to her community and ancestors opened up the possibility to pick up the shreds of her ancestral knowledge and use them to reinterpret her life and purpose.

Virgina Ajxup’s story reminds me of my grandmother’s story because she was also told that our Maya culture was no longer needed. However, my grandmother continued with her life as best she could. She had the responsibility of raising six children on her own in the city and did not have the time to ponder the necessity or value of keeping her Maya language and dress. I inherited her strength, perseverance, and practicality. These character traits are also part of the knowledge we carry in our blood (Holmes, 2000) as Maya women. What these stories demonstrate are the implications of gendered and racialized factors involved in the forced
internal migration for women and men. Given that more and more Maya young people are moving to the cities in order to access better employment and educational opportunities, the cultural struggles may well repeat themselves in this new wave of internal migration. It is therefore important to see that Maya Indigenous education has a key role to play in educating our youth as our societies are continuing to transform. Reclaiming Maya knowledge and making it accessible to Maya youth can potentially aid them in believing in themselves and having a sense of pride in their Indigenous identity. The knowledge keepers from other communities who live and practice the culture have a role to play in the sustaining of cultural knowledge.

For MIE to discuss living examples of communities where traditional ways of social organizing still exist, it is important to access the Elders and knowledge keepers that practice them. For example, the small towns of Nahualá and Sololá are examples of places where these practices are still in use. In these communities, there is a place for state laws as well as traditional laws. The traditional laws are maintained and carried out by the Elders’ Council. For example, one of the laws in Nahualá prohibits selling communal land to outsiders, and it is obeyed because of the lived experience of many people whose traditional homes were expropriated and are now working as maintenance workers (Rodríguez Guaján, 2001, p. 20). Furthermore, Indigenous Maya women are also increasingly participating in Maya traditional councils as our Grandmothers used to. As already illustrated in the previous Chapter, choosing a leader based on her or his trajectory and the nawal she or he was born with is exemplified by the life of one participant, Cristina Coroxón. In her story, she recounted how she served as mayor of her community for a year (Cristina Coroxón, July 16, 2007). Because these examples illustrate that these practices are still lived successfully today, the proposition that further research into the practices and knowledge in these places where they are successfully used so as to inform the curriculum contents for Maya Indigenous Education be done is a valid one. It is also relevant in light of the situation of exclusion experienced by women and girls at present.

Given the current complex relations between women and men and also the imbalance in gender relations that dictates that a woman is not to participate in activities outside of her home or community, learning about the knowledge and wisdom found in the Tzolk’in can once again bring back the understanding that a person’s gifts and roles within community, as described in the Tzolk’in, cannot be contested, whether that person is a woman or a man. Wuqub’ Iq’explains:
Una respuesta que la cultura o la cosmovisión Maya la podría dar a este mal [machismo] sería por ejemplo asumir con responsabilidad y vivencias estos elementos que nos da el calendario Maya. Por ejemplo, si una mujer u hombre es XXX, independientemente de que sea hombre o mujer, su función es curar a la población, ser la médica/o o traumatólogo/a. Esa es su función. Hay que verlo allí y no tanto si es hombre o si es mujer. Por allí veo una respuesta. Lo otro es que, por ejemplo, si una mujer es XXX, debería de ser abogada, debería de abogar. Entonces ver eso como la función o misión. Yo pienso que a los académicos habría que formarlos allí y no ver si es hombre o si es mujer sino que ver que allí hay una función y una misión. Yo creo que eso fue lo que nuestros Abuelos, eso fue lo que hicieron. Nació un niño y se ve en qué día nació, para guiarlo.

An answer to address this illness [sexism] situated in Maya cosmovision is to assume the responsibilities and living examples that the Maya Calendar provides us. For example, if a woman or a man is born under the X nawal [spirit], his or her function is destined to be healing the people, regardless of whether this person is a woman or a man … that’s their function. We have to see it from this angle [of responsibilities as guided by the Calendar] and not so much based on whether they are a woman or a man. I see a solution along these lines. Another example is that if a woman is born under the X nawal, then she should be a lawyer and she should advocate [for our people]. We should see it along the concept of [fulfilling] a function or mission. I think that if academics analyzed the situation from this perspective and not whether or not they are women or men. I think this is what our ancestors did, this is what they did. When a child is born, they would look at the day it was born in so they could guide it. (Wuqub’ Iq’, May 24, 2007)

This understanding of social functions and roles to fulfill based on a person’s gifts and the energy of the spirit under which he or she is born breaks the pattern of confining women to roles inside the house. The position also breaks the Western stereotype that Indigenous women have traditionally been kept from participating in important roles in community. He explains:

Por ejemplo, ¿Qué pasa con las comadronas ahora? Ellas salen. Y cuando es por misión, se respeta. El hombre tiene que entender y todo esto se debe de decir durante las pedidas: esta mujer tiene esta misión y no debe de dejar de cumplir con su misión porque si no, ella y sus hijos sufrirán estas consecuencias. Por lo tanto, si la mujer tiene que salir, que vaya. Y el hombre se queda durmiendo o viendo a los niños. Por eso te digo que es bastante relativa esta cuestión del
machismo y del feminismo porque yo he visto en las comunidades cuando esto pasa. Ahora el problema también es que no se da el valor a la mujer que está viendo un parto, o a las que curan un niño o niña. Se dice que porque es mujer y porque es Maya es curandera. Yo no le digo así, yo le llamo una médica.

For example, what happens to midwives today? They go out to fulfill their roles. And when the woman is fulfilling her mission [responsibility], this is respected. The man has to understand her functions and this is the reason that these roles are to be stated from the moment women are asked to marry: This woman has these functions and they must be respected, otherwise, she and her children will suffer the consequences. Therefore, if a woman has to go out, let her do it. And let the man stay at home and take care of the children. This is why I tell you that the question of sexism and feminism is relative because I have seen both situations in communities. Now the problem lies also on the fact that women who are midwives are not given the value they deserve, or those that heal the children.

People only say that because she is a woman and because she is Maya she is a healer and I do not agree with this title, because she is a doctor [and should be called such]. (Wuqu' Iq', May 24, 2007)

As mentioned earlier, some Maya women continue to live by teachings that identify them as Maya in relation to their communities. The problem raised by Wuqu' Iq is that Maya women are valued so little for their small knowledge and services. This trend is evident especially when non-Indigenous peoples visit Indigenous communities, and ask them to heal them through ceremony or through the use of traditional medicine and will only pay a small amount or nothing at all. This is where the devaluing of Indigenous knowledge, the exploitation of Indigenous people, and the appropriation of our knowledge is evident. This issue also reflects the need to work toward the centering of Indigenous knowledge in the academy and to condemn practices that devalue the vast knowledge Indigenous peoples hold. Regarding the tensions arising from re-centering Indigenous knowledge, Debra Jr. (1991) asks, "If the knowledge of the Indian community is so valuable, how can non-Indians receive so much compensation for their small knowledge?" (p. 40). In the context of determining who is an expert or a professional and thus worthy of substantial economic remuneration, it is relevant to discuss the importance of centering Indigenous epistemology and knowledge in order
to validate the extensive knowledge carried by our peoples today. This discussion also serves the purpose of advocating for equitable compensation adequate to their needs for the work of these experts and professionals who have been schooled in a traditional and Indigenous education setting in their own communities, using their own tools for gathering and making meaning of knowledge.

In the following section I discuss more examples of participant stories and how I engaged with them given my own personal location, experience, and vision. The participants also demonstrated through their stories the divide that exists between professionals trained in Western schools and those who are relegated to the margins of society because their knowledge is not valued in the same manner. The following stories show that following the Tzolk'in to guide, accept, and delegate community roles is a common practice today, and that there is need to develop ways in which to accredit these knowledge keepers as professionals in their own right.

**Women as Community Educators and Important Carriers of Knowledge**

I begin with the story Cleotilde Vásquez shared with me about growing up with her grandmother and learning about Indigenous women’s strength, roles, value, and responsibilities. She relates this particular moment in her life as pivotal in giving her the strength she needed to leave her community, to learn Spanish on her own and, through her jobs as a domestic worker, attain a Grade 6 level schooling. I honor her story here because she reminds me of my grandmother. My grandmother also left her community at a young age to flee from an arranged and potentially abusive marriage to a much older man. She has never said much about her own mother because my great-grandmother passed away while my grandmother was still a small child. However, from my conversations with her, I gather that my great-grandmother still spoke to her in her dreams. My grandmother describes how she knows that my great-grandmother has continued to protect her throughout her life. And, although my grandmother did not go back to the community and she did not continue to wear the traditional dress, she also held deep within a sense of resilience against a backdrop of barriers that made her life as a woman in the urban center difficult. Therefore, from these two Grandmothers, my own and Cleotilde’s, the ancestral knowledge passed down included the values and responsibilities of Maya women and also how to be strong and overcome barriers. This is her story:
La educación de padres yo aquí no la mamé mucho porque yo mamé una educación más de abuela. En el seno yo estuve más acompañando el proceso de mi abuela. Entonces, por lo menos para mí, haber estado con mi abuela fue una experiencia mucho más rica que la de mis padres. Si porque mi abuela, hay cosas, que por lo menos ahora no las voy a decir verdad. Pero hay cosas que han marcado mi vida y que las veo hoy por hoy como una realidad en mi vida. Yo mamé eso, y es por eso que yo he podido mantener mi firmeza en actitudes, en palabras, en principios. El valor de la palabra por ejemplo…. Que se dice pero que no se practica. Entonces, ese valor de la palabra para mí tiene la tradición oral. Para mí, la tradición oral tiene todo el conocimiento ancestral. La sabiduría por ejemplo de la relación de la espiritualidad es algo muy profundo, que por ejemplo, yo realmente no estoy a favor de que se comparta con todo mundo porque siento que pierde ese valor. Y entonces estas fueron partes que mi abuela me enseñó. Por ejemplo, todo el proceso alrededor del parto. Todo desde el momento de la gestación, de los nueve meses, el cuido del post-parto, de la etapa después del parto y todo un proceso de enseñanza y de aprendizaje pues es un proceso también de comunitariedad alrededor de quienes orientan toda esa parte, que serán las comadronas, las abuelas, las tías, las suegras. Entonces, allí juegan un rol importante las mujeres. No digo la mujer sino las mujeres. Ese trabajo de transmisión de la experiencia, de transmisión de la sabiduría y de cómo entonces ese entorno se vuelve como muy de un calor humano. Que viene tu bebe y entonces esos consejos que se dan. Entonces, toda esta parte, que por supuesto, eso de estar viviendo en mi casa con mi familia que no se trasmite solamente oralmente sino que se practica también. Porque desde niña también he aprendido que si uno es del occidente entonces hay fiestas solo para niños, y de allí solo para adultos. Entonces no, nosotros somos colectivos y nosotros también estamos dentro de ese proceso de la escuela y cuando nace un bebé. Al igual, estamos todos presentes cuando nace un niño o cuando se muere un anciano. Entonces, creo que es toda una escuela que uno va mamando.

Deep inside, I followed in my grandmother’s footsteps. Therefore, it was more meaningful for me to have spent time with my grandmother than my parents. This is so because my grandmother [taught] me things that I am not going to tell in detail but, they definitely marked my life and have today become a reality. I suckled on that and it has allowed me to maintain strength in the way I behave, what I say, and what my values are. For example, the value of giving your word … which is something that is said but it is not really put into practice. And the value of the word for me is exemplified in the oral tradition. For me, oral tradition
embodies and contains all of our ancestral knowledge. For example, the wisdom found in our spirituality is very deep and I do not sanction its transmission to everyone because I feel that then it loses that value. … My grandmother taught me everything about having children. This is everything from the moment of conception to the nine months of gestation, postpartum care, and what happens after the birth, and this is all a process built around community because it is women, the midwives, the Grandmothers, the aunties, and the mothers-in-law who guide this process. Therefore, this is where women play an important role. I am not saying one woman, but rather, women in the plural. Because this is a collective work of transmission of knowledge, of wisdom, and of how this wisdom is enveloped in warmth. Therefore, all of this is not only transmitted orally but is also put into practice. … And we are collective beings because we are also inside this process, like a school, when a baby is born. Therefore, this education is one that Maya children start to assimilate from the moment they are born. (Cleotilde Vásquez, February 15, 2007)

Cleotilde brings to bear the similarities found among Indigenous cultures across the globe. She speaks to education at home, protecting knowledge, and some characteristics of Indigenous women’s knowledge and how children learn. I want to first address how she learned what she knows about being a Maya Mam woman from her grandmother. Her reluctance to share those teachings indicates her responsibility to protect that knowledge (Battiste, 2000a, 2000b; L. T. Smith, 1999) based on a collective understanding of the dangers of outsiders appropriating it and misusing it. I also interpreted this as a sign that trust did not quite exist between us. This is normal, since she did not fully know me nor did she truly know where this knowledge would end up. It reflects the realities that divide myself as a researcher and a participant, particularly in situations where the relationship is just beginning. It also reflects the protocol I have learned regarding the sharing of traditional knowledge. The other important aspect of her story is that she shared a common example of how girls learn about their bodies and embodied learning, particularly in relation to birth and child rearing. This is woman’s domain. I feel that this piece of her story illustrates the way that gender is constructed from a Maya perspective. Earlier in the dissertation she is quoted talking about how she grew up freely in the sense of not being forbidden to participate in activities or fulfill roles that mainstream society deemed to be male. And this is the approach she takes to teaching her own grandchildren about their roles as members of the Maya Mam community in the 21st century.
I now turn to discuss María Alicia Telón’s story. As a member of the Maya Kaqchik’el sociolinguistic group, she received a formal education that allowed her to become a teacher and bilingual and intercultural education expert. She works for PROEIMCA. Her mother’s side of the family has the responsibility of safeguarding white maize seeds. Her father’s side of the family keeps and transmits knowledge of traditional and ceremonial dances. She is also a family counselor and shared that bilingual and intercultural education is moving towards reaching out to parents in an effort to enable them to transmit cultural knowledge to their children. This is important as not all Maya women possess the knowledge they require to guide their children and other youth according to the values of Maya Indigenous knowledge, especially if this was not part of their upbringing:

A veces las niñas y los niños llegan a veces con inquietudes a los padres y no siempre tienen la formación. Yo misma tuve que hacer autoformación permanente en cultura Maya y culturas indígenas, desde lo que hay en el país y fuera del país. Entonces, yo como madre se que muchas madres como yo necesitamos seguir formándonos en culturas indígenas y eso es lo que vamos a tratar de hacer con las madres y padres de familia.

Sometimes girls and boys go home with lots of questions [after school] and parents do not necessarily have the knowledge to answer. I, too, underwent a constant process of self-education to keep myself informed and versed in Maya culture and in other Indigenous cultures, both from this country and outside. Therefore, as a mother, I know there are other mothers out there who need this education in Indigenous cultures and this is what we are trying to do with parents.

(María Alicia Telón, March 6, 2007)

The importance of reclaiming traditional knowledge that has been deemed irrelevant—such as the case of the Tzolk’in—merits further research. I posit that it is imperative that more scholars demonstrate that this knowledge is not dormant or useless. As responsible researchers, we need to demonstrate that historical factors have caused it to be hidden behind Western and dominant constructs of knowledge. For example, we need to expose the state policies responsible for the lack of intergenerational knowledge transmission within communities. A pressing issue is the gap that exists between Elders and youth, because, as participants stated, many young people and even their parents are
refusing to speak Maya languages. Therefore, it is my position that teaching and experiencing Indigenous Maya Knowledge, such as that found in the *Tzolk’in*, is necessary for the survival of Indigenous Maya culture and society.

Currently, there are many factors that prevent this knowledge from being taught in schools or even in communities. One is a lack of understanding of the applicability and use of Maya Indigenous knowledge. The other is a lack of knowledge and assumption that using Indigenous Maya languages in education are worthwhile because “we already speak it at home” (Ventura, 2007). For example, people, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike, who live in urban centers no longer practice agriculture due to a lack of available land. The internal migration to the cities from rural areas due to a lack of employment and also the loss of arable land resulting from the encroachment of corporations make it harder to apply and maintain Indigenous Maya knowledge about the land and agriculture. It is true that some sectors of the population in the city do not see the relevance of this particular type of knowledge. Further, the assumption underlying the schooling of children who do work the land with their parents is that they will cease to work the land and, thus, lose a large part of their Indigenous Maya identity. This is a real issue for some parents who refuse to send their children to school based on this fear:

Entonces, él, un tanto limitado y un tanto precavido nos dio la posibilidad de estudiar en la escuela primaria. Es decir, unos dos años, tres años. Y él nos decía, “No. Hasta allí. Porque si no dejarás de ser Indígena, de ser campesino. Vas a dejar de ser agricultor. Ya no vas a querer el maíz; ya no vas a querer el fríjol. O sea, vas a dejar prácticamente tu tierra.” Entonces él nos retiraba a esa edad.

And so, he [my father] although he had limited resources and much caution, gave us the opportunity to attend elementary school for two or three years. He would tell us, “That’s enough. Otherwise, you will no longer be Indigenous, a peasant. You will no longer be a farmer. You will no longer want corn; you will no longer want beans. This means you will practically leave your land.” And so he would take us out of school at that time. (José María Tol, March 1, 2007)

María Alicia Telón demonstrates that the cultural knowledge of Maya people thrive as understood and applied in today’s context. María Morales Jorge shared how she found the strength within herself to demonstrate to her own siblings that she was capable of fending for
herself economically. Whether it is a circumstantial event or one that illustrates the strength of our Grandmother’s knowledge, as she states in the following passage, is up for debate. I believe that she demonstrates the inherited knowledge and strength that our Grandmothers possessed. She states:

Dentro de mis hermanos, yo ocupó el quinto lugar. Entonces ya habían crecido tres de mis hermanos grandes y como ellos crecieron diferentes a mí, por eso me miraba como una niña rebelde porque yo no le daba mis recursos. Yo compraba mis bolsas de granadilla y de membrillo y las vendía. En el tiempo de la chintla o sea, del güisquil, yo empezaba a escarbar y vendía por libra la chintla. Pero viendo como yo consigo recursos era con la idea de demostrar que no solamente los hombres pueden conseguir para mejorar la situación económica, pero así mismo una mujer lo puede conseguir. Mis tejidos y mis [otras] ventas me ayudaron mucho.

I am the fifth sibling. [My mother] had already raised three of my older brothers, and because they are different than I am, then I was coined a rebel. I would buy bags of [different fruits] to resell. And during the harvest of the chintla [a vegetable related to zucchini squash], I would gather it from the earth and sell it by the pound. I would not give up the income I made. I would buy things to sell, and always with the idea in mind that I would show everyone that not only men can improve the household economy, but we women, we can too. My textiles and my [other] sales helped me a lot. (María Morales Jorge, June 6, 2007)

In this case, María takes up the issue of members in a Maya family not ascribing to what I have coined Maya values whereby gender roles are interchangeable and fluid depending on a family’s needs. To explain, she described her desire to improve her socioeconomic condition within a family structure that viewed economic independence as a male domain. In contrast to Cleotilde’s story, who described parents who encouraged her sense of independence and did not interfere with her goal to provide a better life for herself, María’s story speaks to the subtle differences in understandings of Maya constructions and praxis of gender. In my observations, the differences in the two scenarios might be explained by the indoctrination in or acceptance of Christian values and women’s roles as exemplified by María’s experience in her family and also her community. Her involvement with the Church marked her early youth and continues to influence her in spite of her close engagement with Maya culture, spirituality, and political
posture. The two examples highlight the claim that Indigenous women “demonstrate that theory happens when we speak out and voice opposition to oppression and the many injustices we have experienced” (Denetdale, 2006, p. 90). It also demonstrates the need to analyze the values inherent in the social organization and structures that we choose to adopt for our lives. The heterogeneity of views espoused in these two examples reflects the need not only to discuss gender roles from culturally specific locations but also to call into question the gross generalizations we tend to make when speaking about Indigenous women.

Final Reflections

These stories illustrate that Indigenous Maya knowledge is not forgotten in a distant past, nor relegated to dead documents that have no relevance today. The Tzolk’in, as both a repository for Indigenous Maya Knowledge and an example of how Maya culture keeps its contents alive, demonstrates the possibilities for social change through the contributions of Maya Indigenous knowledge and peoples today. However, understanding that not all communities follow cultural protocols that center Indigenous knowledge brings to light the issue of how to bring the values of the knowledge found in sacred documents and instruments like the Maya calendars into the education system. Is it possible for the Tzolk’in to make links between science education, mathematics, art, architecture, and social studies in a holistic way so as not to compartmentalize the knowledge embedded in it? How would this curriculum look? How would teachers be trained in order to teach it? Is it even possible within a Western education framework where subjects, units, and even pedagogies are atomized? I do not have answers for these questions. However, the participants’ stories illustrate the possibility of honoring the contents of the Tzolk’in according to their own understandings and contexts, and how these teachings are incorporated into their everyday lives. The most important application today is posited to be the traditional way of choosing leaders – an issue that merits further research. Moreover, the Tzolk’in is also a key referent for the mediation of disputes because it focuses on balancing the energies between all actors involved—whether women or men—who are causing discord.

Finally, I would like to posit that these two applications of the knowledge in the Tzolk’in suggest that Indigenous Maya peoples today remember the voices of the Ancestors on how to become “Complete Beings” or Jun Winaq’ through a combination of tapping into their Maya
ancestral knowledge and applying it to their lived experiences. Overcoming social injustices due to racism, sexism, and other ‘isms’ becomes more possible when a culturally grounded concept, such as the Jun Winaq’, is at the center. Because identities are constructed through the interconnection of social, political, spiritual, and educational practices, it is evident that the Tzolk’in is also a methodological tool through which one can analyze his or her identity. In other words, stories and experiences are crucial to the creation of identity. For Maya peoples in general, spirituality is central in this construction of Indigenous identity. In the next Chapter I discuss the possibility of envisioning a different model of citizenship, one that centers Creator.
Chapter 7
Indigenous Education and Building Citizens
of a Nation of Peoples

Introduction

Uno tiene que cuestionarse si quiere formar ciudadanos como lo dice la estructura actual, porque [esta postura] siempre beneficia al sector [elite] poderoso del país. Entonces, esa ciudadanía es a favor de ellos. … Esa que se conceptualiza desde el Estado y cuál es esa ciudadanía que nosotros estamos construyendo como Pueblos Indígenas. [Y dentro de esta estructura] ¿qué elementos, qué esencias le vamos a sumar a este ciudadano?

We have to question whether we want to educate citizens as dictated by the current structures, because this [position] only benefits the powerful [elite] sector of the country … What is the position of the State and what is the type of citizenship that we are building as Indigenous peoples? [And within this structure] what Maya elements would be included? What are the characteristics that we want in this citizen? (María Alicia Telón, 06 March, 2007)

What is the relationship between the gendered and holistic nature of Maya Indigenous knowledge in education, nation building and citizenship building from critical Indigenous perspectives? If the current characteristics of a citizen, and thus, of the nation-state do not correspond to the realities lived by Indigenous peoples in Guatemala, what other ways of envisioning these concepts would contribute to the creation of a more equitable society? In this Chapter, I follow up on the suggestions from previous Chapters that illustrate how Maya Indigenous ways of knowing conceptualize a healthy society. This conceptualization requires a rethinking of citizenship: what kind of citizens would foster a society that engages and negotiates across difference. It also suggests that this new citizenship would incorporate certain characteristics and goals that would also impact the mainstream, Western education imparted in schools today. The main differences center around understandings of Indigenous peoples’ relationship to one another and to the land based on Maya Indigenous languages for most, but described in Spanish or English for others who have not learned their distinct languages and live
in diaspora. My hope is that one day Indigenous peoples who no longer speak their own distinct languages will be able to reclaim them.

As already illustrated, Maya Indigenous knowledge is accessed in various ways, as blood knowledge (Holmes, 2000), through ceremony, dreams (Castellano, 2000; Graveline, 1998), and Indigenous practices firmly grounded in Indigenous ways of being and epistemologies. This discussion makes evident the central role spiritual practices like ceremony, has for Indigenous peoples in general, and Maya Indigenous education in particular. In Chapter 5, I describe the dangers of essentializing spirituality and defining it as static.

In this Chapter I analyze, from an Indigenous and decolonizing standpoint, the possibility of creating a different kind of citizenship that will strengthen Maya peoples’ spirits. The goals and process of the suggested model are based on the principles, values, protocols, and systems of Indigenous Maya knowledges to suggest a manner in which any group could recreate their model of citizenship.

The participants in this study described in their conversations the power of their cultural practices, particularly their spirituality. I also understand the strength that comes through engaging in Maya cultural practices: it is a point of convergence between the participants and I. The application, embodiment and practice of spirituality also unite Indigenous peoples across the globe (Dei, 2002 Wane, 2006, 2011; Mazama, 2005). One example is the participants’ practice of consulting the Maya calendar upon rising in the morning, in order to choose activities that are most suited to that day (Tol, 2007; Us, 2008; Wuqub’ Iq’, 2007, Yac Noj, 2007, Telon, 2007). Likewise, the participants expressed their spirituality helps them overcome the challenge to live each day the best way possible. A distinct purpose is to ensure that Indigenous knowledge and a new kind of citizenship is passed on to the members of the younger generation (Iseke-Barnes, 2003).

In the first part of this Chapter I first address the elements of a new conceptualization of citizenship put forward by the participants. These elements create a working model for how to engage citizenship from an epistemologically relevant standpoint. Indeed, the words of the participants also suggest that reclaiming and reconstructing traditional forms of leadership is intrinsically connected to land and territory, as well as the reclamation and honoring of women’s
knowledge and traditional roles in society. Thus, these issues speak to the gendered nature of Indigenous knowledge and practices and suggest a need for critical analysis from Indigenous critical standpoints.

Engaging the tensions that currently exist around territorial control over land and resources directly affects how education, as a site of knowledge reproduction and the creation of citizens in a Western, Whitestream sense, must be reformed to be used as a catalyst in first, valuing Indigenous knowledge and second, applying a critical lens to dismantling the colonial imaginary as represented in the production of identities and nationalisms that strengthen neocolonialism and promote gender injustice and violence. The discussion on gender relations is thus centered on the understanding of the Jun Winaq’. From the standpoint that this proposition is not merely about contesting and opposing current Western models of governance, but rather, about creating alternative systems that make sense to Indigenous peoples, it can be argued that it possesses elements of an Indigenous feminist, anticolonial framework. This framework asks: Who does the Indigenous cultural and spiritual practices framed in this model, serve? Where can this lead the Maya as a nation of peoples? Following Shahjahan (2005), my own position on spirituality is that it is culturally grounded, based on specific spatial and epistemological contexts, as well as driven by a sense of social justice for all beings. Again, this notion of justice is gendered and critically engages with the transformative possibilities of Indigenous knowledges and philosophy to address issues of gender inequality.

Second, I address the issue of what this model contests: Why is it necessary to build a different kind of citizenship when Indigenous peoples live within democratic nation-states? Whose idea of democracy do we refer to when we discuss social justice and equity? To address these, I again review the conceptual framework grounding this argument: an Indigenous decolonizing framework (IDF). As already stated, IDF aims to reclaim, validate, and apply ways of being that have always been part of Indigenous culture, but that have been made dormant or have been overlooked in the face of colonization.

Third, I delve further into the implications for education of creating a new kind of citizenship that has the potential to provide a framework for unifying Maya peoples. Could this model enable the Maya to negotiate with the state as an equal nation, if they choose to do so?
Looking at the implications for education, I also address the pedagogical implications of nation building and citizenship in the context of contesting the idea that the mestizo represents the national identity in Guatemala. The myth of the mestizo (who acknowledges Indigenous blood, but denies its actual relationship to Indigenousness) creates ambivalence about and essentializes Indigenous identity based on race alone (Lawrence & Dua, 2011). This chapter thus builds on current debates regarding the kind of nation Maya peoples envision and propose and a new citizenship that centers Creator, relying on the stories of the participants. For this purpose, I engage in a discussion that links the production of Indigenous and mestizo identities and the inherent exclusions of women, Indigenous peoples, and philosophies and thought in education outside of the Euro-American, Western, and Whitestream philosophies. I argue that this not only has direct implications for Indigenous peoples in Guatemala, but also for Indigenous peoples elsewhere.

The general objective of this chapter is, thus, to link the goals of education as it stands today, to the “production of democracy, the practice of education and the constitution of the nation-state [which] have been interminably bound together” (Mitchell, 2001, p. 51, as cited in Grande, 2004, p. 33). I want to demonstrate in this chapter that building a new kind of nation and citizenry based on Indigenous epistemological positions that center Creator and spirituality within contemporary Maya ways of organizing and being illustrates the tensions that arise between reforming education in the current hegemonic system or building a system outside of this paradigm. I will also highlight the importance of looking at the goal of education as more than the attainment of material rewards, in contrast to most of the literature, which focuses on the role of education in the improvement of the socioeconomic and political conditions of Indigenous peoples. In highlighting the lack of spirituality in these endeavors, I hope to create discussion and invite reflection regarding the goals of Indigenous decolonizing projects overall, and of decolonizing education in particular.

**The Concept of a Nation of Peoples: Spirituality, Leadership, and Territory**

Oren Lyons is a chief of the Onondaga nation of the Haudenosaunee Peoples (referred to as the Six Nations in English Canada, and the Iroquois in French Canada). He is one of the Indigenous leaders who went to the United Nations at the Geneva Conference in 1977. Along
with Indigenous leaders from Central and South America, he helped establish the Indigenous Peoples Working Group in 1982. As a faith keeper, his life is devoted to maintaining, promoting, and safeguarding the knowledge he holds for the next seven generations (López, 2007). Lyons’ (2000) idea of building a “Nation of Peoples [whereby] American Indians conceived nations as representing themselves as a ‘people’—a group of human beings united together by history, language, culture, or some combination therein—a community joined for common purpose: the survival and flourishing of the people itself” (454). His perspective picks up where Maya intellectuals Cojtí Cuxil, Son Chonay & Rodríguez Guaján (2007) begin their proposition about the construction of a multi-national state. The idea of a “Nation of Peoples” centers not only consensus building and acting upon it for the peoples residing in a particular territory, but suggests that we need to go beyond the material aspects of sovereignty and advance our spiritual practice of centering our decisions and actions on Creator.  

Further, he also questions the different degrees of sovereignty exercised by Indigenous nations, particularly focusing on those with established Treaties. These factors are crucial in understanding the vision—heterogeneous but unifying—of the elements that are necessary to rebuild a nation. My own position expands on Oren Lyons’ concept of a Nation of Peoples, and I discuss some of the issues that began this conversation. This Chapter merely represents the beginning of a timely exchange that needs further development, as I am aware that I need to conduct research on a larger scale with more communities and Elders to plumb the depths of the vision.

Discussing how education affects citizen building and citizens abide by education for the purpose of upholding a nation-state is relevant to the current climate of increasing Indigenous participation in state institutions. The participants and I have all experienced singing the national anthem at school, saying our prayers, and also being inspected for cleanliness. We have also shared experiences regarding the gendered nature of education, whereby girls and boys are given different standards to meet, such as the widely accepted notion that school is not a place for girls (Morales, 2007). There are, of course, many layers to the statement, in particular as it applies to Indigenous girls and their access to state education. Maria Morales recalled the reasons some parent choose not to send their children to school, regardless of their gender. She stated that the

16 For further discussion on the term sovereignty, see S. Lyons (2000) where he discusses the limits of Western sovereignty and proposes a rhetorical sovereignty that involves praxis; and Sandy Grande (2004) for further discussion on the implications of applying a Western concept to an Indigenous issue.
quality of education is very poor; some of the teachers rarely show up to teach and moreover, because their language is not a Maya language, there is little they can teach K’iche’ speaking children (Morales, 2007). What is a common thread among state-sponsored education is the mission to prime a child to become a “good,” “orderly,” and “fit” citizen of a nation-state.

Sandy Grande (2004) refers to the nation-state as the historical actor who has established exclusionary social relations and has imposed its notions of an imaginary non-Indigenous national identity. I would like to suggest that for Guatemala, beliefs regarding “the contemporary ideal of a strong indigenous [sic] nation” proposed by Taiaiake Alfred (1999) are relevant, in particular the definition of “wholeness with diversity” (as cited in Grande, 2004, p. 170). Alfred describes the foundation for this as a “strong commitment and solidarity to the group confined with tolerance for difference” (as cited in Grande, 2004, p. 170). As stated throughout the dissertation, the unifying thread in Maya culture for healing from the impositions and remnants of colonization is becoming Jun Winaq’. Through this process, spirituality is recognized, valued, and practiced as an intrinsic element of everyday life and one that can benefit negotiations with the state. These negotiations have taken place in Guatemala through the signing of the Peace Accords. Although it is far from a treaty that would lead to sovereignty, it echoes Grande’s (2004) interpretation of that “sovereignty is a project organized to defend and sustain the basic rights of Indigenous peoples to exist in wholeness and to thrive in relation to other peoples, … to come together in solidarity around the shared goal of decolonization” (p. 171).

Again, remembering that the Maya and other Indigenous peoples in Guatemala do not have at present the legislative tools is useful in understanding that the advances made to this point in relation to gaining recognition and the fulfillment of state obligations towards Indigenous peoples is only a first step in negotiating better social and economic conditions for all of the people living in Guatemala. However, the potential for this discussion to catalyze interest in considering the creation of Treaties in Guatemala could hypothetically provide a platform from which to negotiate with the state on a nation-to-nation basis. Further, Maya Indigenous involvement within formal political frameworks is somewhat new. Thus, I also agree with Grande (2004) that there is an equally important need to “theorize the status of Indigenous peoples outside Western political frameworks” (p. 168). If we could theorize outside of these frameworks, could we theorize from Indigenous standpoints? Grande (2004) suggests that
Indigenous peoples can, and, citing a number of critical Indigenous theorists, warns us about the tensions that could rise from “employ[ing] the liminal and interruptive space of post-colonialism to formulate a counter-discourse to Indigenous subjectivity” (p. 168). I would like to acknowledge the positions of prominent Indigenous Maya scholars who take the postcolonial point of entry and terms to open the discussions of Maya modernity and the nation-state. Specifically, Emilio del Valle Escalante (2009), who employs a postcolonial framework in analysis that is literary in nature. But I am interested in understanding why, given the growing literature written by Indigenous scholars and based on Indigenous standpoints, are scholars intent on applying postcolonial and modernist-colonial frameworks? I suggest that as scholars, we need to take a critical perspective on questions regarding the politics of knowledge production and attempt to understand the implications of continuing to ghettoize and marginalize Indigenous theorizing. I do not have an answer as to why some scholars choose to do this, but could it be that Indigenous theories, concepts and discursive frameworks are just not an option from which to choose? Therefore, my analysis is that Indigenous struggles for sovereignty run the risk of becoming just another discourse if Indigenous decolonizing projects are written in inaccessible languages, and furthermore, refer to Western, Euro-American concepts that continue to marginalize Indigenous knowledge, voices, and theories. To clarify, I do not ask academics to render invisible those already established frameworks from which to analyze injustice and power differentials, as they help us raise critical questions about sovereignty, democracy, the nation state and Indigenous struggles. However, I do think that as producers of knowledge, academics need to deeply analyze the reasons for not utilizing Indigenous standpoints and philosophies that are, in my opinion, as critical and engaging as other Western allies. In choosing a political stand from which to voice Indigenous struggles, one cannot simply move across the political spectrum. As Sandy Grande, citing José Barriero, points out, “in the context of jurisdication and political autonomy, traditional Indigenous processes are characterized by the struggle to stay independent of both left and right wing ideologies” (Barriero, as cited in Grande, 2004, 35). This point speaks to power differentials in knowledge production and needs to be further addressed if Indigenous Maya peoples are to successfully engage with Western, Eurocentric knowledges and still retain the essential values and ways of being that differentiate them from the colonizing other.
Sovereignty as a concept

Sovereignty is not an Indigenous concept. As Scott Lyons (2000) of the Ojibwe-Bullhead Clan, points out, sovereignty, derived from French, is based on notions of property rights and territorial demarcations. However, it is central to arguments of self-determination and a cue to reflect upon what Sandy Grande (2000, 2004) calls the democratic imaginary. The democratic imaginary differs from democracy in its traditional Western sense. Oren Lyons in an interview (López, 2007) stated that:

In 1492, Haudenosaunee—which is better known as the Iroquois by the French, and Six Nations by the English—already had several hundred years of democracy, organized democracy. We had a constitution here based on peace, based on equity and justice, based on unity and health. This was ongoing. As far as I know, all the other Indian nations functioned more or less the same way. Their leadership was chosen by the people. Leaders were fundamentally servants to the people. And in our confederation, there was no place for an army. We didn’t have a concept of a standing army, and we had no police. Nor was there a concept of jails, but there were of course fine perceptions of right and wrong, and rules and law. I would say that in most Indian nations, because they had inhabited one place for so long and were a people for so long, the rules and laws were embedded in the genes of the people more or less, in the minds of the people certainly, but not written. Plenty of law, almost on everything, but unspoken. Unspoken unless transgressed. There was always reaction to transgression. (López, 2007)

Oren Lyons’ discussion above regarding democracy as an ancient concept developed and practiced by the First Peoples of this continent illustrates two things. First, that the Euro-American thinkers that populated the United States appropriated the concept and blended it with the ideas they brought from the Ancient Greeks, and packaged it as their own. Secondly, and the selective application of democracy to the dominant group contradicts its very essence. In other words, understanding the history of democracy from outside of the colonial imaginary, one can see how it can bring together as well as disarticulate the very foundation of democratic nations and societies. At the same time, this tension calls for consensus on how to restore this concept to its original meaning and, thus, promote the well being of all peoples. This particular concept also highlights questions about the acceptance at an international level that democracy is the opposite of tyranny, and thus, by discursively ratifying it, little scrutiny is demanded regarding its
application to Indigenous nations. The discussion of democracy also points to very distinct contexts of self-determination, and thus, of Indigenous educational goals, between Indigenous peoples in most of Latin America and in Canada or the United States. The point in question relates to the existence of treaties that have facilitated, but also hindered, negotiations between Indigenous peoples and the nation-states in the latter regions. Most of the literature produced regarding Indigenous or Tribal sovereignty is directly linked to discussions of treaty rights.

In the case of Guatemala, and most of Latin America, the historical events that led to conquest did not facilitate the drafting of treaties and thus, negotiations between the Indigenous peoples and the Europeans. The Mapuche Nation in Chile and the Qechan of Mexico (Grande, 2004, p. 77) were the only ones in the region to have this legal recourse. This makes comparative work difficult to conduct although not impossible. This is because the homogenizing project of the nations has been deemed a failure (Yashar, 1998 & 2005) all across Abya Yala. It has created complex social relations based on racialized and gendered perspectives of who counts as a political actor or decision maker and who is worthy of the (in)adequate social security and civil liberties afforded to its citizenry. It also illustrates the differentiation in the application of Western democracy to Indigenous peoples. Democracy is not applied horizontally because the mere presence of different nations (albeit, domestic sovereignties) disrupts the logic of the nation as one, hegemonic, unified body, as expressed through the U.S. Pledge of Allegiance, which states that the U.S. is “one people, one nation.”

My ruminations on the value of spiritual practices and cultural revitalization and reclamation are not divorced from a critical position on the dismal living conditions the majority of Indigenous peoples endure. Like many Indigenous nations, a calculation of development index factors shows that the Maya have the highest incidence of poverty and least access to education in Guatemala (MINEDUC & UNESCO, 2004). Education, thus, has always centered the material world, on a Eurocentric discourse of rights and responsibilities that renders spirituality and Creator irrelevant. Therefore, as stated before, spirituality through the culturally specific concept of Jun Winaq’ also alludes to Sandy Grande’s (2004, p. 57) concept of spiritual sovereignty. Her position illustrates that sovereignty is a restorative process. In other words, taking the foundational element of Indigenous spiritualit(ies) as an entry point, Indigenous peoples must understand that:
Rather than representing an enclave, sovereignty … is the ability to assert one-self renewed—in the presence of others. It is a people’s right to rebuild its demand to exist and present its gifts to the world … and adamant refusal to dissociate culture, identity and power from the land. (S. Lyons, 2000, as cited in Grande, 2004, p. 57)

The challenge for Indigenous peoples is to operate in a manner that centers each group’s distinct knowledges and spiritual practices to ground each person’s individual actions on the reciprocal relationships Indigenous peoples understand to have with the land and the universe. In this way, Indigenous spiritual and cultural practices can potentially drive the process of building a nation of peoples that will reject the material excesses professed by the capitalist-driven, materially grounded, colonial societies most people live in today.

**Citizenship, Eurocentrism, and Education**

The centering of European philosophies and the need to emulate the development and progress of European societies based on a liberal and patriarchal economic model shaped the objectives of education. As a consequence, populations who were granted access to education also gained economic solvency and active participation in the direction of the country, which partly explains why the dominant ladino oligarchy has maintained political, economic, and social control since the colonial period. Indigenous peoples in Paxil Kayalá have never had the opportunity to negotiate with the state as Native peoples have in Canada. There simply were not treaties to discuss until the signing of the Peace Accords (PAs) from 1991 to 1996. The PAs have opened up dialogue between the state and Indigenous peoples, thus making citizenship a site of contestation. The questions that María Alicia Telón asks at the beginning of this chapter point to one of the functions of MIE: forming citizens of Indigenous Nations. It also points to the nature of this citizenship and its functions.

I now provide some background to contextualize contemporary agreements in Guatemala, such as the Agreement on Identities and Rights of Indigenous People (AIDPI) signed in 1995. Although this agreement does not hold the same legal validity as the Constitution, or establish nation-to-nation negotiations between the Guatemalan nation-state and Indigenous peoples, once the government ratified it, the possibilities for refounding the nation-state opened up. Although the conceptual framework for establishing a nation and citizenship have gone
unchallenged publicly, I demonstrate that the participants perceive that this reconceptualization theoretically opens up the possibility of reconfiguring the concept that determines who is considered to be a citizen and thus, of constructing educational models such as MIE. From this position, I analyze the power relations that continue to suppress the level of participation and influence Indigenous Maya people have when negotiating with the state regarding how Indigenous education will be conceptualized and offered.

**Strengthening a nation of peoples**

Los Mayas tenemos nuestra propia educación, nuestra propia visión y quehacer político. Estos aspectos son una de las bases por las que aun estamos presentes. La educación y desde las decisiones internas, las comunidades siguen defendiendo sus más caros intereses. A pesar de todas las formas de extinción…. La lucha por su planteamiento político, es como un mismo horizonte, es un trabajo de largo plazo. No hay condiciones, no hay voluntad política en este país … es un sistema que está pensado exterminar la vida y la identidad de un pueblo.

The Maya nation has its own education, vision, and forms of governance. These are some of the reasons why we are still here. Our education and how we make decisions inside our communities [are examples] of how we continue to defend our interests in spite of attempts to kill us. In order to attain our rights and dignity, we have to fight for an ideal, for a plural state where there is space for each nation to address its concerns. But unfortunately, there are no such spaces in this country … the goal to assimilate and acculturate [Indigenous Maya peoples] is more prevalent. Therefore, Maya society as a nation of peoples has no way in. The struggle for our political agenda still has a long way to go. The conditions and political will are simply absent. Our small achievements remain scattered because we face a system that looks to exterminate the life and identity of our people. (Virginia Ajxup, July 02, 2007)

Remembering my own life and my experience that exclusion is part of everyday life prompts me to analyze how the routines of pledging allegiance to a nation and a religion imposed by colonizers came to be seen as normal and part of the project of defining citizenship for nation building. During my brief time in primary school in Guatemala (Grades 1–5), my time in the United States (Grades 5–8), and in high school in Canada, the routine did not change, only the
language. We sang the national anthem in Guatemala, pledged allegiance to the flag in the United States, and sang “Oh, Canada” in Canada. We said morning prayers in all three contexts—even if the school was not Catholic, as was the case in the United States. We were always expected to come in uniform or very clean clothes that had no logos, stains, or rips. The ritual of keeping clean (as dictated by Western colonial standards) is something that has been documented as arising from a missionary goal of cleansing Indigenous peoples of their perceived *backwardness* and *savagery* (Hall, 1997; L. T. Smith, 1999). Discussing this issue, Waxaqib’ Iq’ adds that:

Todos los gobiernos han querido ladinizar al “indio,” al tal llamado “indio.” Se creó un estereotipo para identificar al Maya: es sucio, torpe, inhumano, sirve únicamente para trabajar en las fincas. Justo Rufino Barrios creó leyes, pero dirigidas eminentemente para la población Maya: para que se meta a la caficultora, a la construcción de puentes … y finalmente, digamos que eso fue desde antes, pero ningún gobierno ha pensado en el bienestar de la gente indígena.

All governments have aimed at homogenizing [literally, turning into a *ladino*] the so-called “Indian.” They created a stereotype to identify the Maya: dirty, dumb, inhumane, and only good for working in the plantations. Justo Rufino Barrios created laws for the Maya peoples to get them involved in coffee production and the building of bridges … and finally, let’s just say that there has not been one government that thought about the well-being of Indigenous peoples. (Wuqu’ Iq’, May 24, 2007)

Similar to Stuart Hall’s (1997) position that stereotyping “reduces, essentializes, naturalizes and fixes ‘difference’” (p. 258), the negative representation of Indigenous peoples is accepted as a normal aspect of everyday social relations in Guatemala. I became more aware of the everyday language that reflects this when I also became the target of these pejoratives while in the field, such as, “You are such an ‘Indian’[read: stubborn or dumb].”

Part of citizenship education, then, should focus on decolonizing the information and messages received from the mis-education imparted in schools. Mainstream Western education fosters the racism, bullying, and name calling Indigenous peoples in Guatemala endure. But the “re-righting” (L. T. Smith, 1999) of the images of Indigenous peoples can end this type of “symbolic violence” (p. 259) through taking the power to tell Indigenous stories from diverse
Indigenous perspectives. Re-righting history and changing negative stereotypes and the negative representation of Indigenous peoples are examples of what L. T. Smith (1999) proposes should be part of an Indigenous agenda: taking power. But, as proponents of such an agenda, Indigenous researchers must also understand the implications of this. There is also the danger of creating divisions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups who are eager to fall back into the unifying rhetoric of universal citizenship: we are all Guatemalans. Claiming an anticolonial and decolonizing Indigenous Maya standpoint might result in divisions and a backlash (Cojtí, 1995, p. 90). Demetrio Cojtí (1995) cautions on this point and posits that the power differentials between Indigenous and colonial powers have resulted in few gains for Indigenous peoples. However, through the exercise of validating Indigenous knowledges, it is possible to take the battle to the academic arena. In that context, the knowledge produced by and for Indigenous struggles can frame the terms of reference and concepts from which new spaces of negotiation can be created and different rules can be followed. This proposition is not new. However, there is not yet a full articulation and analysis of the implications Indigenous scholars and knowledge have for altering power relations between Indigenous peoples and their colonizers. Some Maya scholars beginning to address the necessary conditions for creating a different nation are D. Cojtí, D. Rodríguez Guaján and E. Son Chonay (2007). In their proposal, they offer some parameters for discussing the implications of re-constructing the nation based on autonomous regions that recognizes the Indigenous collective right to self-government (p. 136). This proposition merits further research and discussions, particularly between Indigenous peoples in Canada or the United States who deal with the State based on Treaties signed before the founding of the colonial Canadian United States governments, to demystify and address some concerns for Indigenous peoples in Guatemala. The issue of the particular traits of a nation-state based on Indigenous Maya peoples’ demands and concerns is an interest of mine for future research.

As I continued my own research process, I became aware that I am not alone in wanting to dismantle the current notion and understanding of citizenship. This understanding of citizenship has not benefited the Indigenous majority in Paxil Kayalá. Therefore, one of the most salient issues arising from this research and the knowledge gathered through the interviews is that a new model of citizenship based on Indigenous worldviews needs to be established. Once again, the agenda is to challenge the discourse that underlies Edward Said’s (1978) conception of
Orientalism, Stuart Hall’s (1997) conception of the construction of Blackness, and the production of stereotypes of Maya peoples. That is, to challenge how education is used to fix meaning and images that devalue and dehumanize Indigenous Maya peoples and in turn, maintain the status quo. This relationship between power and knowledge is not definitive and Indigenous Elders, intellectuals, leaders, and activists believe that Indigenous knowledge in education can bring balance back into society.

A finding in this research us that the lack of Indigenous content and positive representations of Indigenous peoples contribute to rendering Indigenous women, and thus Grandmother’s Knowledge (GK), invisible. Although the elements that will be included in a MIE curriculum have yet to be finalized, there are some characteristics shared in the participants’ discussions of how to strengthen their identity as a nation of Maya peoples, and it is through fostering a different citizenship through MIE. This would reverse the negative representation of Indigenous peoples in history and in the classroom while challenging the essentialist view that states Indigenous professionals are no longer pure if Indigenous peoples today no longer fit the negative and fixed stereotypes perpetuated through history. These stereotypes are the foundation of the nation and either celebrate the Indigenous past or recoil from the present-day condition of poverty, illiteracy, violence, and other the negative adjectives reserved for Indigenous peoples alone.

As stated earlier, the efforts of Maya intellectuals, such as Victor Montejo (2005), Demetrio Cojtí Cuxil (2007), Elsa Son Chonay (2007), and Demetrio Rodríguez Guaján (2007), publicly declare the need to create a state that acknowledges, values, and is constructed from the different cultural, ethnic, racial, linguistic, and epistemological perspectives of its diverse population. The arguments call for the construction of either a multinational nation-state (Cojtí Cuxil, Son Chonay & Rodríguez Guaján, 2007) or a pluricultural one (Montejo, 2007). Their proposition is that the creation of a multinational nation-state requires and analysis of the current situation of Indigenous peoples in the context of a colonial, monolingual, and Eurocentric state. To this effect, the book *Nuevas Perspectivas para la Construcción del Estado Multinacional* (Cojtí, Chonay & Rodríguez Guaján, 2007) analyzes the gap between discourse and praxis in all branches of government (executive, judicial and legislative). Their investigation focuses on decentralized and autonomous government entities, public financial offices and entities designed
to promote dialogue, to suggest that there is a lack of participation of Indigenous peoples in these realms. They found that building an education system for Indigenous peoples based on this analysis requires instituting reforms to the current education system (e.g., including some Indigenous knowledge in the curriculum, learning the language the community is in, and perhaps creating a few more schools to make education more accessible). There is a debate about where education should take place, whether inside or outside of the national system. This participant expressed his preference for education outside of the system, or a community-based Indigenous education:

Una de las posibles vías para poder retomar y revivir los principios y valores es por medio de la educación. Pero una educación fuera de un sistema. Podría yo decir que sería una educación comunitaria en donde realmente se pueda vivir. Es decir, no podemos regresar a vivir como vivían nuestros abuelos, hace muchos años, pero como hacer, como recrear esa parte, recrear la educación, recrear dentro de todo lo que acontece cotidianamente como la violencia, la cuestión del machismo, del feminismo, porque casi son lo mismo.

One of the possible venues for reclaiming and reliving the foundations and values of Indigenous peoples is education, but an education outside of the system. I can attest that it would be a type of community-based education where it would really be possible to live [the culture]. What I am suggesting is that we cannot go back to living the same way that our ancestors did many years ago. But how do we do it? How do we recreate this part, recreate education, and recreate it amidst all of the happenings of everyday life, like violence, sexism … because all of these are the same. (José Yac Noj, May 12, 2007)

Speaking to the gendered aspect of citizenship building, José Yac Noj stated the need for MIE to take place outside of the system, in the community. Community is where the knowledge lies, where the Grandmothers and Grandfathers who are still alive can interact with the younger generations in order to teach them their knowledge. Another participant, Edgar Choguaj, shared what the CNEM is working on and will soon publish about the characteristics of Maya Indigenous education, but this time, within the system:

Una de las cosas de la educación Maya es que es holística. Vamos a publicar un documento…. Vamos a tratar cuatro temas fundamentales:
¿Cómo tratar la educación para Pueblos Indígenas?
¿Cómo debe de ser la educación Bilingüe Intercultural?
¿Qué líneas debemos de llevar como escuelas Mayas escolarizadas?
¿Cómo abordar la educación comunitaria, que también es la educación Maya?

One of the issues we will address in a forthcoming document is the holistic nature of Maya education. … We will address four fundamental issues:

How do we approach education for Indigenous peoples?
How should Intercultural Bilingual Education be instituted?
What are the guiding principles for Maya schools?
How should we approach community-based education, which is also Maya education? (Edgar Choguaj, June 6, 2007)

The discussion of maintaining MIE outside of the state education system precludes the discussion about the risks associated with including MIE within the national system, even if only to begin disseminating some of the curricular contents. María Alicia Telón offered this caveat:

Esta [educación intercultural] es una modalidad impuesta porque no fueron los Pueblos Indígenas quienes decidieron la modalidad. Lo que pasa siempre es que son otras ideologías que se siente que son las modalidades para los Pueblos indígenas y no es así.

This [intercultural education] is imposed because it was not Indigenous Peoples who decided upon it. What usually happens is that any alternative ideology is assumed to be adequate for Indigenous Peoples, but that is not so. (María Alicia Telón, March 06, 2007)

The historical imperative for refusing this addition to the current education curriculum stem from the time the nation of Guatemala was founded in 1871. I will briefly discuss some historical events that illustrate how Guatemala was founded upon liberal economic and development notions that depended upon coffee production and, eventually, sugar production. The complex relationship between identity, the nation, and development then arose. The nation-state at the time was not different from today’s neoliberal state. To flourish economically, the state required land, resources, and exploitable labor to provide profits, and thus capital for the elite classes. Indigenous peoples provided the labor force and received few benefits in return.
This structure has undergone few changes since colonization. As already described in Chapter 2, democracy has not served the interests of Indigenous peoples. Considering that the Guatemalan constitution did not even recognize Maya people as citizens until 1985,\textsuperscript{17} it is fair to conclude that one of the reasons for Indigenous peoples’ demands for a different kind of citizenship lies in the very foundations of democracy and citizenship in Guatemala. Victor Montejo (2005) and Demetrio Cojtí (2005) agree that these inclusions reflect legal advances towards dismantling a racist and exclusionary state for a multicultural one, but one that lacks the political will to implement these advances. I concur with Sandy Grande (2004) in her critique of Western forms of governance and organization in the United States and their impact on Indigenous and tribal peoples:

\begin{quote}
The persistent belief in the superiority and emancipatory powers of democracy, even among radical scholars, indicates the degree to which whitestream America has never really understood what it means to be Indian [sic] and even less what it means to be tribal. This ignorance has deep historical roots and even wider political implications. … the uncompromising belief in the superiority of Western social and political structures—that is, democracy and citizenship—was the motivating force behind the numerous expurgatory campaigns exacted against Indigenous peoples. (p. 94)
\end{quote}

I want to connect these events to the work produced by Bonita Lawrence (1999), a Mi’kmaw, urban, mixed-race scholar. Lawrence has written extensively about gender and the regulation of Native identity through an historical review and a woman-centered, anticolonial analysis of the Canada’s Indian Act. She proposes that since the 1763 Royal Proclamation, First Nations people in Canada have had to survive a series of legal documents that not only determined that “status Indians” were the only people legally entitled engage in a nation-to-nation relationship with the state, but also left them out of the process of defining the term \textit{Indian}. The original nation-to-nation negotiations professed by the 1763 Royal Proclamation were diluted through the introduction of the Indian Act and the regulation of Native identity. In

\textsuperscript{17} Guatemala’s 1985 Constitution recognizes the existence of Guatemalan Indigenous groups of Maya descent and the “right to their cultural identity in accordance with their values, their language and their customs” (Art. 58). It also establishes that the state, “recognizes, respects and promotes their ways of life, customs, traditions, forms of social organization, the use of the Indigenous dress by men and women, languages and dialects” (Art. 66). For further discussion, see Cojtí (2005).
particular, processes such as enfranchisement\textsuperscript{18} had negative effects on Native women due to the patriarchal nature of the Indian Act: “Wives and children were enfranchised automatically along with their husbands, but no provision of land was made for wives. Husbands could leave their land to their children, but not to their wives” (Lawrence, 1999, p. 51). This is an example of patriarchal state policies deciding who is fit to own land. The land question, when analyzed through a gender lens, provides the evidence that the regulation of identity was inextricably linked to gaining access to unceded land and therefore transferring control to the increasing settler population.

Similarly, the regulation of Maya identity had equally devastating effects. For example, once Guatemala gained its independence from Spain in 1821, Mayan peoples were driven from their fertile lands and subsistence farming in the South to less fertile land in the highlands and mountains. Gómez & Martínez (2000) state that, “Between 1871–1944, the export-based coffee oligarchy held the power of the liberal regime … [and] benefited from reorganizing the allocation of resources to satisfy its market needs” (p. 7). This period is characterized by the construction of many state policies that expropriated Indigenous peoples’ communal lands\textsuperscript{19} and also facilitated access to cheap labor.\textsuperscript{20} These laws legitimized the usurpation of lands from the Indigenous populations while increasing the political, economic, and social solvency of the nation’s powerful classes, the \textit{ladinos}. This condition is painfully predicated on a series of state policies aimed at assimilating Maya peoples (cultural genocide) while simultaneously engaging in an operation to racially “cleanse” the nation through massacres: a situation I witnessed and which has become part of my story and, therefore, my analysis and goals for decolonizing education. Therefore, this cultural genocide provided the needed justification for allocating resources into non-Indigenous and \textit{ladino} education.

\textsuperscript{18} Lawrence describes enfranchisement as the “removal of Native status from an individual, thereby creating a Canadian citizen of Aboriginal heritage who has relinquished his collective ties to his Native community and any claims to Aboriginal rights” (Lawrence, 1999, p. 52).

\textsuperscript{19} This was outlined in Decreto 170 of the Constitution.

\textsuperscript{20} Reglamento de Jornaleros (Day-laborers Law) and Ley Contra la Vagancia (Anti-Vagrancy Law) exacted 150 days of forced labor for Mayans who had no land and 100 from those who did.
As part of a nation-building project, Maya identity was seen as an obstacle to modernity, which “illustrates the reliance on the colonial imaginary as the discourse for domination and legitimization” (Gómez & Martínez, 2000, p. 11). These events marked only the beginning of the nation-building project, one that was trumped in 1945 by the Agrarian Reform. Through this reform, approximately, “79% of the usurped lands were returned, instigating the 1954 Counter-Revolution by the oligarchy with the military and financial support of the United States” (Gómez & Martínez, 2000, p. 8). Realizing that assimilation policies did not suffice, the state began a series of systematic genocide operations that took hundreds of thousands of lives, mostly Maya.

The previous discussion illustrates the tensions between identity regulation as a means to bring about a decline in the Indigenous population, wanting to maintain a certain Indigenous base in order to continue to have access to exploitable labor, and, to a certain extent, the desire to maintain an image that, at least legally, Guatemala has made some improvements in their ethnic relations.

As suggested above, there is a direct correlation between official declining numbers in Indigenous population and the encroachment of government upon Indigenous land. State governments continue to promote legally mediated negotiations that simply situate Indigenous identity in terms of race (Lawrence, 2011, p. 98). This endeavor applies both to nations that have negotiated land treaties, such as those in Canada and the U.S., and to those who do not have this national legal tool, as is the case for Indigenous peoples in Guatemala. The similarities are based on the effects of their negotiation to access citizenship rights and responsibilities, as well as the tensions created when Indigenous peoples decide to work outside of the system.

Clearly, this dissertation does not address the intricacies of the processes leading up to the negotiation and creation of treaties in Canada and the United States, but the parallels that can be drawn between the situations of non-Treaty nations and Treaty nations are noteworthy: in the end, both contexts exist inside the imposed colonial borders of nation-states founded upon the pillage, displacement, and genocide of Indigenous peoples across the Americas, or Turtle Island (Churchill, 1997; Grande, 2004). Would creating new treaties between Maya peoples and the state in Guatemala improve their ability to negotiate sovereignty, self-determination, and collective rights? This question has pursued me throughout the writing of this chapter.
Understanding the mechanisms and implications of such a proposal calls for more inquiry and fieldwork.

Regardless of whether the situation of Indigenous peoples in Guatemala resembles some of the general experiences of First Nations peoples in Canada or Indigenous and tribal peoples in the United States, what this chapter suggests is that the creation, development, and maintenance of an Indigenous citizenship is crucial for Indigenous peoples. It becomes more than a new political project: it has to be more than “simply the latest in the long line of endeavors aimed at absorbing American Indians into the prevailing model of the ‘democratic citizen’” (Grande, 2004, p. 94). It has to do with exercising Indigenous peoples’ agency to determine the kind of relationship they want to have with the state and how to determine their own futures. In effect, this resembles some of the goals of the Maya Movement, which I discuss in the next section.

**Maya Struggles for Self-Determination and Creating a New Maya Nation**

The revitalization of Maya culture is not new. The work has gone on for centuries in different forms and with different leadership (Grandin, 2000, as cited in Montejo, 2005, p. xvi). Today, the struggle for self-determination is known as the Pan-Maya Movement (Cojtí Cuxil, 1998; Cojtí Cuxil, Rodríguez Guaján & Son Chanay, 2007; Fischer & Brown, 1996; Warren, 1998). This movement has focused on strengthening its intellectual leadership, “to undermine the authoritativeness of non-Maya, or kaxlan accounts—be they Guatemalan Ladinos or foreigners—which, until the recent indigenous [sic] activism and resistance surfaced, monopolized the representation of Maya culture and national history” (Warren, 1998, p. 37). However, unlike the intelligentsia of Marxist and socialist circles, Carol Smith (as cited in Montejo, 2005) has suggested that Maya leadership, “has engaged Maya who were not intellectual (or even literate), who did not leave written views or ‘archives’, and thus did not leave a simple trail for us to trace” (p. xvii). Smith’s observation has the good intention (Haig-Brown, 2006) to suggest Maya leadership is community based and grounded in culture and language.

However, the contradiction lies on the fact that most of the accounts of attempts to revitalize Maya culture are written by non-Indigenous scholars, through non-Indigenous lenses,
as allies. Their work serves to give prominence to the issues as they also “other” Mayas outside academic and professional circles. This othering is reflected in Smith’s aforementioned quote when she references the illiteracy of Maya leaders in the Spanish language as well as their status as nonintellectuals. To avoid “othering,” decolonizing scholarship must draw on the stories, languages, practices, values, and ways of knowing in an effort to engage difference (Mohanty, 2003). Engaging difference gives value to diverse intellectual modalities, some of which cannot be measured with Eurocentric yardsticks, which reflect the way in which “Western disciplines are as much implicated in each other as they are in imperialism” (L. T. Smith, 1999, p. 11). This section demonstrates some of the ways in which the Maya Movement conceptualizes nationalism and advances the goals of self-determination. It also proposes that the overall goal of implementing a citizenship model that centers Creator is to move away from the dichotomies created by Western intellectuals and theories, and move beyond the material dimension of prosperity and development. These issues are directly related to education given the general view that education is a means towards improving economic and social well-being.

As mentioned throughout the dissertation, the signing of the Accord on Identity and Rights of Indigenous Peoples (AIDPI in Spanish) on March 31, 1995 between the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unit (URNG in Spanish) and the Guatemalan government and, later, the Peace Accords on December 29, 1996, implied a restructuring of the relationship between the state and Indigenous peoples. This moment also opened up the possibility to demand the right to construct an Indigenous education system. These events made history as they are perceived to have ended the internal Civil War that plagued Paxil Kayalá since the counterrevolutionary military coup of 1954 when the socialist democratic government of Jacobo Arbenz was defeated. Although an analysis of the limited participation of Indigenous peoples in the life of the nation is not the focus of this dissertation, I have already provided some historical moments that illustrate that Indigenous peoples in Paxil Kayalá have demanded access to social systems and safety nets accorded to citizens of this nation. The incorporation of Indigenous peoples in the revolutionary movement destined to oust the government (as a result of its unfair treatment of all citizens regardless of their cultural background and ethnicity) provided Indigenous Maya peoples with a platform from which to voice their own demands from an ethnic and cultural perspective. Although their presence constituted a mere addition to the rank and file of the guerrillas, they did change the ladino–Indigenous social relations to the point where they could work together to
“analyse the local and national reality and organize around working for structural changes” (Bastos & Camús, 2003, pp. 36–37).

The knowledge shared by the participants raises further questions and issues that need to be resolved within the Maya Movement regarding the notion of citizenship. Specifically, I refer to the tensions created by the strategies proposed to change the education system. I propose that one strategy is based on individual rights and the other on Indigenous rights. I demonstrate that the intercultural education approach differs greatly from the MIE approach. These two differ in their concepts and the MIE approach would allow each of the three Indigenous nations in Paxil Kayalá (Maya, Garifuna, and Xinka) to determine their own curriculum contents and the language of instruction based on their regions. The government has interpreted the long consensus-building process as a signal of lack of agreement. This, in turn, is interpreted as an indication that Indigenous peoples need government to make decisions, thus rendering invisible the little power gained at the negotiation table through policy instruments. Further, it negates the possibility of creating a governing system based on Indigenous concepts, social organizations, and ways of being (Denetdale, 2008).

This history illustrates the importance of having a policy framework from which Indigenous Peoples could demand recognition and respect based on differentiated and distinct identities in the building of a new nation-state (Bastos & Camús, 2003, p. 253). In this section, I only address the policies and laws that have opened up spaces from which to demand the construction of an Indigenous education system in negotiation with the nation-state. It is limited to this scope as the interviews and observations mainly addressed how Maya leaders and professionals are dealing with these changes within their own Maya organizations and communities. Therefore, it does not address perceptions of the contents that communities are demanding be included in an education system built according to their own positions and characteristics. Instead, this section addresses the contents of the Maya Proposal for Education (MPER) and also delineates the participants’ perceptions of citizenship based on their own life stories. I refer to their stories to make the point that reconfiguring citizenship goes beyond making the state accountable for including and extending social and economic rights to Indigenous peoples. As Irma Velásquez Nimatuj (2004) states, Indigenous peoples have historically faced a kind of:
Racism [that] is intrinsically tied to the perpetuation of a system that grants economic and legal privileges to specific sectors of society. [This situation illustrates that] Maya people have not been victims of chance, ignorance, or the malice of Guatemalan leaders and ruling elites. Laws and military force have historically kept the majority of Indigenous peoples away from education and political power, forcing them into an enslaved workforce. (p. 74)

As has been stated, the situation has changed somewhat with the signing of the Peace Accords, and specifically, for meeting the Accord on Identity and the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The reasons for this change stem from the fact that the government is now bound to a set of obligations that they ratified and are now accountable for according to international law. Given this, why the state is so reluctant to fulfill its responsibilities? The short answer is provided by José Yac Noj:

Si tenemos nuestra propia forma de ver el mundo, de vivir, de hablar tenemos el derecho de serlo. Entonces, pero eso no significa que no valoremos a las otras naciones. Pero creo que lo difícil es eso, de perder el control de todo. Porque si nos dejaran [el gobierno] como Pueblo, como nación Maya y el poder de auto-gobernarnos, auto-sostenernos y todo pues la verdad es que se terminaría el poder de los pocos. Entonces, realmente allí está el problema.

If we have our own way of looking at the world, of being in it, of speaking [language and perception], we have the right to be [who we are]. But this does not mean we do not value the other nations [living in Guatemala]. But I think this is the issue, it is about losing control over everything. [This is] because if they [government] would leave us as a People, as a Maya Nation, with self-determination and self-government, then it would mark the end of the few. Therefore, this is where the problem lies. (José Yac Noj, May 12, 2007)

Although a historical overview of state formation is important, it is beyond the scope of this dissertation. What is salient here, however, is to understand the complexity of the power structures that have undermined Indigenous peoples and excluded them from participation in the building of this nation in any capacity other than as free and exploited labor. Moreover, the complex relationship of Indigenous peoples to the state fluctuates and ranges from dependency to demands for autonomy and self-determination. José Yac Noj sees the relationship between the nation-state and Indigenous peoples in Guatemala as very similar to that of a domestic dependent nation as defined by the United States government, or as dependent sovereigns as proposed by
Taiaiake Alfred (2009), and explores the history of the concept of statehood as well as modern criteria for statehood (defined territory, permanent population, effective government, capacity to enter into foreign relations, and independence). Alfred (2009) points out that statehood in the modern international sense is a relatively new concept developed between the 15th and 17th centuries. However, it is clear from José’s comments that at least some Indigenous Maya are aware of the challenges that lie ahead in a country where the elite 10% 90% of the land (Casaús Arzú, 1992; Bastos & Camús, 2003; Cojtí Cuxil, 2001). This issue is paramount in Indigenous–state relations. As reflected in José’s opinion and my own observations of their increasing political participation in government, Indigenous peoples will continue to pressure governments to relegate control of Indigenous education and social institutions to Indigenous peoples. It is timely to mention that scholars such as Cojtí Cuxil, Son Chanay and Rodríguez Guaján have begun exploring this option (2007). It is an issue that needs further debate.

Following the analysis of Bastos and Camús (2003a) and my own observations in the field and to this date, I can infer that the division within the Maya Movement can be described as the division between “traditionalists” and “leftists.” Traditionalists built their rhetoric around Maya cultural and ethnic claims. Leftists, inclined toward a Marxist-Socialist agenda, centered their analysis on class struggles and were largely responsible for creating the revolutionary guerrillas who brought about the negotiation process and signing of the Peace Accords. There are scholars who propose that the traditionalists lack a political agenda given their focus on cultural reclamation and language issues (see Brown, Fischer & Rodríguez Guaján, 1998; C. Smith, 1990). I also propose that the traditionalists generally seek to remove themselves from negotiating with the state, while the reformists or nationalist Maya struggle to gain political spaces within the government. Further, there are also Maya neoliberal proponents such as Estuardo Zapeta, who believe that unifying the country based on nationalist discourses that blur the ethnic lines are more important because this approach would truly integrate Indigenous peoples into the current system, allowing them to benefit economically and socially from their citizenship (see Beverly, 2008). Building a new kind of citizenship, thus, falls in between the two sides, but would make the ideals of Indigenous Maya peoples more attainable within the complex social relations that Indigenous Maya peoples and the state find themselves at present.
The different positions within the Maya movement are expected. It also points to the tensions that exist among the Maya population, particularly in relation to the goals of the new citizenship and even to the need to create a new conceptualization of citizenship. Do Maya peoples seek economic and political gains from a system that has yet to prove its commitment to the ideals of democracy, as defined by the Haudenosaunee, and justice? In other words, would the realization of economic and political gains really promote self-determination and peace for all peoples or merely reform the current social, economic, and political conditions of marginalization and continue to undervalue Indigenous knowledge, contributions to society, and, most important, of Maya spirituality? I believe this tension will not be resolved in this dissertation. It is a limitation of this study but a critical question that can guide future research.

Maya Indigenous Education and Creating New Citizens

Indigenous Maya education within the context of the current crisis of the monocultural, monolingual, and exclusionary nation-state in Guatemala raises the questions: What are the characteristics of an education system that respects all forms of life as embodied in Indigenous knowledge and forms of social organizing? Can MIE create new citizenship models that go beyond individual rights, in which respect, recognition, and the acceptance of difference are realized within the context of a legitimate multi/intercultural nation? (Bastos & Camús, 2003; Cojtí Cuxil, 2009b). In this section, I delineate the elements that make MIE a viable way to educate and foster a new kind of Indigenous citizenship. I borrow from Scott Lyons (2000), who states that, “it has always been from an understanding of themselves as a people that Indian groups have constructed themselves as a nation” (p. 454). Further, his distinction of a people as a “group of human beings united together by history, language, culture … a community joined in union for a common purpose: the survival and flourishing of … itself” (S. Lyons, 2000, as cited in Grande, 2004, p. 169) is central in this proposition. I build on this to argue that the intrinsic values of respect, reciprocity, honor, truth, and interrelationship are at the core of choosing the type of human being one wants to become our respective communities. As members of Indigenous communities, we need to analyze how each individual can reclaim their particular Indigenous knowledge and spirituality, and whether it centers a relationship with a higher force: Creator.
Building a citizen of a nation of peoples based on respect

Deborah Yashar (2005) has argued that Indigenous movements today in Latin America challenge existing homogenous models of citizenship and statehood that often exclude Indigenous peoples. She explains how the demands of these well organized Indigenous groups include equality within the context of a democracy and civil rights, greater involvement in the sociopolitical arena, and a revamping of existing socioeconomic systems. For the purposes of this section, I argue that equality under Scott Lyons’ citizenship model of a “Nation of Peoples” (S. Lyons, 2000) implies balance and respect for all forms of life and all nations living in Paxil Kayalá:

Para mí que no podemos hablar nada más de una nacionalidad sino que de varias. Deben de ser varias nacionalidades porque si entendemos eso no es que nos estemos revelando o que queremos hacer independientes como nación pero más bien, lo multicultural otra vez. [Esto es] porque si tenemos nuestra propia forma de ver el mundo, de vivir, de hablar tenemos el derecho de serlo. Entonces, pero eso no significa que no valoremos a las otras naciones.

I believe that we cannot speak of only one nation [of peoples] but rather, [we have to speak] of many. [We have to speak of] different nations and understanding this does not mean we are rebelling and want independence [from the nation-state] but rather, we are alluding to [the concept of] multiculturalism. [This is] because if we have our own way of seeing the world, of being in the world, of speaking, then we have the right to [follow it]. This does not mean that we do not value other nations. (José Yac Noj, May 12, 2007)

Multiculturalism, for Yac Noj, is grounded on knowing where one comes from, and strengthening individuals in their knowledge of their own culture, language, and relationship to the universe. He also posits that without this, one cannot enter into intercultural relations, which for him means, “an equal, balanced and respectful exchange of knowledge and social relations” (José Yac Noj, Personal communication, December 2010). This distinction is important since many of the documents and goals for education reform purport to enhance and promote interculturalism (MINEDUC, 2005, 2006). However, it is clear from the interviews that the current education system continues to focus on the assimilation of Indigenous peoples into the dominant culture. The following quote summarizes this issue:
Siempre es asimilación sólo que ahora es más sofisticada, más fina. Ya no es de arrebatar o halar a la fuerza sino que muy sutilmente. Y uno no siente, y cuando siente ya está.

It is the same assimilation [strategy], except that it is more subtle now. It is not about taking away [one’s culture] by force. It is slow, and when you least realize it, it is too late. (José Yac Noj, May 24, 2007)

This participant alludes to another issue that prevents the creation of Indigenous education: co-optation. The state is subtle in how it incorporates Indigenous peoples into its systems. The respondents are aware that co-optation is a major issue amongst Indigenous professionals working within the state. On this topic, Pedro Us suggested that perhaps the reason Indigenous Maya peoples are not advancing is because they are thrown into a system in which they are not capable of functioning:

Creo que una de las capacidades que nos hace falta es la capacidad de gestión política. No tenemos ni la formación, ni la habilidad para ese tipo de cosas. Entonces, son varios factores.

I believe that one skill we are lacking is our ability to engage in political work [within the system]. Most of us do not have the training or the skills to engage in these issues. (Pedro Us, January 16, 2008)

Including Indigenous peoples to participate in a system that does not allow for the engagement of different worldviews, languages and approaches to merely fulfill equity quotas results in tokenism. As part of a strategy used by government to create the appearance that they value and actually listen to Indigenous peoples, it is clear from the participants’ observations that the inclusion of Indigenous peoples in state posts does not preclude a change in policy or benefits to the Indigenous Maya. Thus, participating in this system results in merely co-opting Indigenous Maya peoples into participating in a system that will never grant them the right of self-determination (Bastos & Camús, 2003; Cojtí Cuxil, 2009b; Montejo, 2005). The discussion on creating a new kind of citizenship addresses this issue and goes beyond it by arguing that the state is engaging and negotiating with Indigenous peoples to waste time and that it will never fulfill its promises if the actors in the negotiation are isolated from their own communities. To counteract this, the inception of a new way of engaging politics is proposed. During our
conversation in 2007, Daniel Domingo stated that although the Peace Accords do not contain all the demands made by Indigenous peoples of Guatemala, they open a door. However, in order for these minimal demands to be met Indigenous peoples need to participate in the political processes inside the system:

Los Pueblos Indígenas no tenemos potestad para ejecutar desde el estado mismo esos Acuerdos de Paz…. quienes son responsables de hacerlo es el estado y en el estado no estamos nosotros [participando]. Entonces, siempre vamos a estar reclamando para que lo hagan y los otros siempre estarán diciendo que sí pero van a estar encontrando maneras de impedir de que eso se haga, que se realice. Entonces, aquí es donde está el valor y la importancia histórica de lo que hoy se llama el movimiento político Winaq’.

As Indigenous peoples, we do not have the authority to execute the Peace Accords … The state is responsible for implementing them and we are not [participating from] within the state. Therefore, we are always going to demand their fulfillment and [the state] will always tell us that they will even as they are finding ways to prevent them from becoming a reality. Therefore, I believe this is where I see the historical importance of what we today know as the Winaq’ [a political party].

(Daniel Domingo López, June 29, 2007)

Daniels Domingo López’s position regarding the lack of Indigenous politicians inside the government structure highlights the reason for creating Indigenous political parties, like Winaq’. Winaq’s roots stem from concerns of having a party that did not abide by left or right party politics. It deals with the state from what the members envision as a Maya Indigenous position that promotes self-determination and collective rights (see López and Bá Tiul, 2009). Working within the state and yet looking for spaces to work outside of it is, in my opinion, a difficult position. I believe this inside/outside position recognizes that the path towards becoming sovereign is still far away. I believe that Winaq’s proposals are the best to date in carrying out an education that is outside the state system.

The differences between the two proposals are that one posits the establishment of an education system outside of the state, while the other, as presented in the following quote from Pedro Us, advocates working within the structure of the state but only if there is a guarantee that Indigenous peoples will occupy enough seats in Congress to ensure that their proposals are heard
and implemented. This guarantee is in stark contrast with the present reality in which there are only two Indigenous people in Congress. In relation to education, this is seen as a challenge for the implementation of Indigenous proposals; two factors prevent reform from becoming a reality:

[Primero tenemos] la distancia de visiones [de educación], el juego de poder dentro del sistema también es un segundo factor. Ahora, yo diría que de allí derivan otras muchas otras cosas. Otro factor que creo que también es importante es la falta de unificación de criterios entre personas y organizaciones indígenas. Es decir, aquí habíamos dos Mayas en el Despacho del Vice-Ministro y afuera personas y organizaciones indígenas y algunos conogeniaban con nosotros y algunos no. Algunos nos juzgaban pero entendían que no era tan fácil que pasaran las cosas. Es decir, que nosotros hubiéramos querido que pasaran más cosas alrededor de la EBI y la educación para pueblos indígenas. Avanzamos algo pero no todo lo que hubiéramos querido querido. Obviamente, las expectativas de la gente eran mucho mayores y aunque no entendi no hubiéramos querido. ¿Entonces, esa falta de cohesión al interior nuestro como indígenas y como Mayas también es un factor y es un desafío a afrontar y a resolver. (Pedro Us, January 14, 2007)

First, we have the gap between the two visions [of education. And second,] we have the power game within the system that is also another factor. There are also other factors [such as] the lack of agreement in opinion between Indigenous peoples and organizations [concerning Indigenous education]. What I am referring to is that here at the Ministry, we had two Maya people working, and on the outside there were other Maya people and Indigenous organizations, and we did not agree on many issues. Some just judged our work without understanding that it was not up to us two to approve anything. What I mean is that, we would have liked for the minister to approve more issues affecting Indigenous bilingual education and Indigenous education, … and although we advanced on some issues, [we didn’t achieve] what we and the people expected and so they would judge us and say that we did not do our jobs as Indigenous peoples. Therefore, the lack of cohesion between and within the Maya Movement is a challenge we need to confront and resolve. (Pedro Us, January 14, 2007)

The challenges of implementing an education system with even a few of the characteristics of an Indigenous education highlight the resistance by the state and non-Indigenous peoples. The understandable multiplicity of demands Indigenous peoples are making
in regard to education and the path to take to fulfill them are only two issues that prevent the development and implementation of Maya Indigenous education in Guatemala. The quote from Pedro Us also raises another issue, and that is how the political process hurts the spirits of Maya peoples. Healing thus becomes a central focus for MIE because Maya peoples will continue into the future to need healing from engaging with educational institutions either as students or as workers. MIE and its focus on spirituality has the potential to heal not only assimilation but also the denigration of the people who are working to implement it at high levels of government and are perceived to be not fulfilling their responsibilities if the proposal for Maya education does not go through.

**New citizens to focus on healing**

Assimilation by force or by subtle means, such as the denigration of Indigeneity within the national discourse of citizenship, requires healing. Healing broken spirits from colonialism, genocide, and exclusion means strengthening the identity and self-esteem of Indigenous students, particularly the Maya but also students of other Indigenous groups. Given this context, it becomes evident that MIE could help counter the effects of the devaluation of many generations for being Maya and speaking a Maya language:

Pero te digo que sí, fue muy difícil para mí porque mi idioma materno es el Kich’e’ y prácticamente allá no hablaba muy bien el español. Lo entendía más o menos pero cuando vine a caer aquí, con mi papá y con mis hermanos, sufrí pero de la discriminación grande en la escuela. Recuerdo que mis compañeros me decían maxquil… esto es un apodo que le dicen… no sé, es como decirte “basura” o sea, lo peor de ti, por ser [mujer] indígena.

I am telling you, it was very difficult for me because my first language is Maya Kich’e’ and I practically did not speak Spanish. I could understand it more or less, but when I came here [Guatemala City] with my father and brothers, I experienced discrimination against me at school. I remember that my schoolmates would call me maxquil…this is the name they would call me … it is like calling you “trash” or, the worst a person can be, and all of this only because I am [an] Indigenous [woman]. (Lajuj Toj, September 14, 2007)
The racial slurs and stereotypes against Indigenous peoples are part of everyday life, as Lajuj Toj shared in her story. I witnessed and heard stories that Indigenous women are more likely than men to wear the *corte* (traditional skirt) and *p’ot* (traditional, woven, and embroidered blouse) and thus were forced to accept public abuse it as part of the burden they bear for identifying themselves as Indigenous. My grandmother’s choice to live in the city and not wear the traditional dress also highlights this situation. In addition, I also experienced it when I chose to put on the dress my grandmother left behind. Though I do not speak the language and have been away from the country since I was 11 years old, when I went out wearing traditional clothes as part of my identity marker, I was called *Maria* by non-Indigenous people (or people who deny their roots) on the buses or on the street, the name they use for Indigenous women. Even my own family who lives in the city or in rural areas scolded me for wearing traditional clothing, calling me “*indita.*” This is a pejorative name given to Indigenous women that uses many patronizing overtones to belittle us. Irma Alicia Velásquez Nimatuj (2004) describes the complex racist relationships between those who wear traditional dress and those who do not, and calls the preservation of this identity marker resistance, strategic essentialism, and a way to distinguish the Maya from non-Maya.

As the example suggests, Indigenous Maya women face racism daily. I can attest that this racialized and gendered way of treating Indigenous women is sanctioned and normalized. These social relations are at the core of Guatemalan society. Once again, I can attest that my maternal family, who still live in very remote areas of the country, live by the saying, “better to be poor than Indigenous.” Of course, there are many complex historical and social relations that make the claiming of an identity a slippery slope, mainly because some people chose to adapt to Westernized, *mestizo* ways of being in order to “save” future generations from being ill-treated.

These complex gendered and racialized social relations illustrate that MIE can provide the tools with which to strengthen the identities of Indigenous peoples in Guatemala. It also has the potential to create critical thinkers who are aware of how colonial history and government policies aimed at “improving the race” of the country have effectively robbed the Indigenous

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21 For a historical review and discussion of the structure and development of Guatemala under the liberal reform government of Justo Rufino Barrios and the relationship to land, national identity building, and the whitening of the nation see McCreery (1976).
majority of their identity. This is not to say that there are not communities and peoples that have not fought for and still hold onto their identity as Indigenous. However, the issue of identity formation from the perspective of building a citizen of a homogenous nation-state needs to be deconstructed and rebuilt. From these examples, it is possible to infer that the proposal to build citizens of a nation of Indigenous peoples thus begins from the understanding that we are all interconnected and every human being has the right to live their identity and is equally entitled to respect. One way to begin is by making MIE a reality:

Entonces creo que es importante que para que se amplíe, se fortalezca y se consolide, no solamente el concepto sino la práctica de una relación respetuosa, igualitaria de hombre y mujer de acuerdo a su naturaleza biológica, espiritual y energética, es importante que el sistema político de Guatemala cambie y de veras se abra a la integralidad de los derechos de los pueblos indígenas y de los pueblos mayas en particular. Entonces una valoración importante de tu estudio entonces es que el sistema oficial, el sistema de educación sea en realidad un sistema amplio, multicultural de la educación en donde exista una educación Maya para el pueblo Maya. Y que no exime (absuelve) de una relación intercultural pero que debe de partir desde un sistema propio. Y entonces si vamos a llegar a comprender, recuperar sino a vivir y hacer realidad esa construcción filosófica de nuestra cultura del pueblo Maya.

I believe it is important to broaden and strengthen the concepts; we need to engage in respectful and equal relations between women and men according to their biological, spiritual, and energetic traits not only in theory but also in practice so that the political system in Guatemala changes in so far as recognizing the rights of Indigenous peoples and of the Maya in particular. … Therefore, an important aspect of your research is that it points to the need to make the current education system truly multicultural where there will truly be a Maya education for the Maya peoples. And this does not mean there will not be intercultural exchanges, but it means that it must be based on our own knowledge. This will allow us to understand and reclaim the philosophical base of our Maya nation so that we can live it and make it real. (Daniel Domingo, Workshop, January 30, 2008)
Tensions and Possibilities of Creating a New Citizenship

As already illustrated, non-Indigenous analysts and allies of the Maya Movement are opening up spaces to debate issues of citizenship and Indigeneity at an international level. However, I assert that while the arguments center a new model of citizenship, they fall short of addressing the epistemological standpoint of centering spirit as the conceptual framework in which to create this new form of citizenship. In this section I demonstrate how this new model will eventually change the mindset of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples who have yet to decolonize their minds to understand that the citizenship required to build a nation of peoples transcends material and state boundaries.

For Maya peoples, the importance of Creator or Ajaw is particularly evident during ceremony. Ceremony, whether centered on Maya spirituality or a mixture of non-Maya and Maya beliefs, is an important aspect of life. In the context of building a new kind of citizenship, I am using the term to bring forth debate among the participants who believe in the importance of transforming education from a repetitive and memorizing ritual to a pedagogy that builds sensitized human beings with all our relations at the center. Therefore, my argument relates to, but differs substantially from, claims that the state is the only system that needs reform or transformation if Indigenous peoples are to fully participate in the building of a new nation:

La re-fundación del Estado requiere la re-fundación de la Nación. Pero la re-fundación de la Nación debe de pasar por el reconocimiento educativo de los Pueblos que conforman esa Nación.

The refounding of the state requires a refounding of the nation. But this needs the agreement of all four Nations of Peoples that make up this nation. (Pedro Us, January 14, 2008)

Pedro Us provides an insight into the factors required for reformulating a nation-state. First, he discusses the imperative for the state to rethink what nation means. He suggests that refounding Guatemala requires the state’s recognition of all of the nations that comprise it and a restructuring of the education system accordingly. I asked what he meant and he clarified that this hypothetical situation makes Indigenous Maya peoples think about whether any of the Indigenous groups in Guatemala are capable of
functioning within a system that recognizes and lives with the differences that each group represents. He shared his view:

Creo que una de las capacidades que nos falta es la capacidad de gestión política. No tenemos ni la formación, ni la habilidad para ese tipo de cosas. Entonces, son varios factores [a considerar]…. O sea que en este momento podemos decir que, con los niños y con las nuevas generaciones sí hay oportunidad. Y hay que fortalecer los programas de Educación Bilingüe en este momento para que los niños empiecen a valorar su cultura, sus identidades, y a tener una educación de calidad que les permita vivir desde su cultura y en su propio idioma y desenvolverse efectivamente en cualquier contexto.

I think that one of the skills we [Indigenous groups] lack is how to engage in political work. We do not have the skills or the abilities required to perform in these areas. Therefore, there are many factors [to think about]…. Therefore, we can say that we have an opportunity with the children and the new generations. So, we have to strengthen our bilingual education programs right now so that children start to value their culture and identities and to have access to quality education that will allow them to live according to their culture, in their own language. And that will then extend into any other social context. (Pedro Us, January 14, 2008)

In this excerpt, Pedro Us takes up the issues that are prevalent in societies where the colonizer’s language and systems of governance prevail, mainly the issue of how to implement an education that will foster cultural and linguistic competency in the dominant language and in Indigenous languages with the purpose of providing the tools necessary for cultural survival within and outside of the culture. This approach to reforming education to fit the needs and sense of responsibility to a multicultural and pluricultural reality offers hope.

Us’s insight offers ground to discuss how decolonization does not necessarily mean separation and isolation from mainstream and Whitestream education and institutions. But it does involve a different way of taking power: through an analysis and action. For example, there have been many theorists and political scientists who, “exculpate all social actors and finally named the state as inherently racist and exclusionary (Bastos & Camús, 2003a, 2003b; Bastos & Cumes, 2007; Casaús Arzú, 1992; Cojtí Cuxil, 1994, 2005, 2009b; Cumes, 2004; Smith, 1990; Velásquez Nimatuj, 2004). This act of calling the state racist is a first step and becomes an
important element in holding it accountable and making it responsible for changing the power structures. However, I also want to add, after Cajete (2010), that Pedro Us’s proposition reflects the way in which Indigenous educators attempt to address, “how Indigenous cultural studies can deepen Indigenous political possibilities, by establishing pedagogical practices that inform and support Indigenous people in the social, political, economic and spiritual struggles” (Cajete, 2010, p. 128). Based on this, it becomes evident that cultural practices like ceremony is a foundational element of Indigenous Maya cosmology and epistemology. Thus, it must also become a site where struggle will continue to take place. I want to repeat that the spiritual dimension of Indigenous Maya knowledge cannot be divorced from education. I also want to emphasize that centering spirituality is a political act. Conversely, political transformation from an Indigenous standpoint implicates a spiritual process necessary to identify the path that must be taken to achieve it:

Ceremony was a way to get to know our reality ... our Grandfathers got to know our cosmos through ceremony in order to see the knowledge embedded there. [Therefore] it is not a matter of faith but of cultivating knowledge through the practice of ceremony [in order] to reach our potential to see and use our energy for the benefit of all peoples. (Pedro Us, January 16, 2008)

Indigenous knowledge centers spiritual practices. Thus, ceremony is a valid way of acquiring knowledge and valid knowledge in itself. This example further consolidates that ceremony and spirituality are, for Indigenous peoples, valid sites of acquiring knowledge and making meaning (Cajete, 2010; Castellano, 2000; Dei, 2000; Dei, Hall & Rosenberg, 2000).

Building a nation of Indigenous peoples requires strengthening the spirits of those who for years have been told they are inferior, subhuman and that their connection to Creator is witchcraft (Battiste, 2000a, 2000b; Dei, 2000, 2010; Dei, Hall & Rosenberg, 2000; Shahjahan, 2005; L. T. Smith, 1999; Wane, 2006). Once again, education for a strong Maya nation needs to
strengthen people’s spirits, which have been broken by repressive colonial institutions, and support the reinstitution of Maya spirituality. It alludes to providing hope for future generations (Grande, 2004). It also means everyone needs to take up the challenge of undoing damage done by the devaluation of Indigenous students for speaking their own Maya language and having a holistic understanding of the world:

En la escuela pasaba la mayor parte del tiempo castigado; no salía al recreo, no entendía la matemática y todavía no entiendo la matemática occidental. Tengo problemas allí. Y entonces, como recompensa a esa discapacidad tenía que quedarme sin recreo.

I spent most of the time at school in detention. I would not go out for recess; I did not understand math and, to this day, I do not understand Western math. I have problems there. And so, because I had that disability, I would not get recess.

(Wuqub’ Iq’, May 24, 2007)

Entonces eso me motivó, a pesar de toda la discriminación que recibí por ser “Indio” o sea, por ser Indígena y todos los apelativos que nos dan, yo los recibí. Pero eso me motivó a demostrar que sí puedo, desde mis propios puntos de vista, puedo.

But in spite of all of the discrimination I experienced for being an “Indian,” or rather, for being Indigenous, I was given all of those pejorative names we are given. But this motivated me to show everyone that I could do anything from my own standpoint [as Indigenous], I could do anything. (Edgar Choguaj, June 06, 2007)

The excerpts taken from my conversations with Maya leaders, intellectuals, and professionals, illustrate that it is possible for Maya peoples to unite based on a strong sense of self, dignity, and pride. They also reveal another struggle: bringing back equality in the realm of respect towards women and men, children and the elderly, and everything that is alive in a person’s surroundings. The words spoken and taken up to Creator illustrate the links between the fights for Indigenous education, self-determination, and land outside of Western conceptual frames and institutions and also within. Finally, there is also the matter of dealing with the nation-state from the position of negotiating the fulfillment of the Peace Accords as a strategy
that will, for future generations, lead to building Indigenous governance and social systems. One approach is to use the current legal framework to push for the use of Indigenous languages in as many spaces as possible. Rodrigo Chub explained:

Creo también que es importante partir de las políticas para que incidamos desde el marco legal y que sí tenemos mucho. Creo que son las estrategias que tenemos que ir implementando y escribiendo para que el Ministerio lo vaya cumpliendo de alguna manera. Pero, pareciera que solamente es la DIGEBI que lo implementa, porque las otras instancias no debido a que siempre hay ese monolingüismo y ese colonialismo, todavía muy fuerte, impregnados en unidades, en personas, en dependencias.

I also believe it is important that our actions are based on the current laws and the legal framework because we have many. I also believe that we need to focus on the strategies we want to develop and implement so that the Ministry fulfills its promises somehow. But it seems as if it is only the DIGEBI that [works towards] implementing them, because it is evident that other departments do not follow this due to their own monolingualism and colonialism that seeps deeply in the offices, people, and departments [of the Ministry of Education]. (Rodrigo Chub Ical, October 31, 2007)

The issue of party formation and the political clout that might be gained from working within the complexities of a nation-state are beyond the scope of this paper. I propose that more research from Indigenous perspectives on the Guatemalan context is needed in order to compare the gains that could be made from both working within the nation-state and outside of it (Fischer & Brown 1996; Cojtí Cuxil, 2009a). The issue that is important for the purposes of this section is the claim that although Indigenous peoples have not accessed education in the same way that non-Indigenous peoples have, the few that have are making gains within the system. However, Maya proponents of Indigenous education need support for implementing their proposals. Therefore, there are many arguments regarding the place of Indigenous Maya education. One position promotes the inclusion of some elements of Maya Indigenous knowledge in Western, public education to make it more relevant to Indigenous students. This position also brings up the issue of increasing access and quality of education for all peoples in Guatemala. There is also the position that Maya Indigenous education should stay within the context and place of Indigenous communities in order to safeguard and strengthen the knowledge before sharing it with non-
Indigenous peoples. All of these positions demonstrate, in my opinion, that making education available to more Indigenous youth is the first step to eventually changing the education system to make it more in tune with Indigenous visions.

Indigenous peoples presumably gained access to the social and economic gains of citizenship, even though they were just recently allowed to participate in the relationship between the state and civil society, through the 1985 constitutional reforms (Stavenhagen, 2002). As Montejo (2005) and Cojtí Cuxil (2005) have argued, the legal framework to improve state relations with Indigenous peoples has advanced, but the obstacle that still remains to this day is to actually implement the laws that have been put into place. In other words, the legal and political gains acquired through the signing of the Peace Accords and the constitutional reforms of 1985 have had more impact on individual and civil rights but have not advanced cultural or collective rights (Hale, 2002). Thus, the participants’ belief that the education reforms accepted by the government represent small gains even though they will not produce the ideal education system Indigenous Maya peoples are asking for. But, in a country where the quality and accessibility of public education is dismal at best, as reflected in the United Nations Human Development Report (2009–2010), where it is noted that only 13.2% of the postsecondary student population is Indigenous, it is important to continue to imagine ways in which future generations will access education that will allow them to live in a dignified manner. Furthermore, education is but one point in a long list of demands for self-determination. Some participants agree with Virginia Ajxup that the state co-opts Maya intellectuals, leaders, and educators into believing their participation in the system will bring about change. However, it is widely accepted that the state will not grant them what they are asking for unless there is a fundamental structural change:

Participar está bien, ahora que hay tantas ventanillas, los espacios nacionales, los espacios que dan los diferentes gobiernos, pero el Estado es toda una estructura de dominación, discriminación. Involucrarse en este sistema ¿no será la réplica de esa dominación?, y al involucrarse en dónde quedaría esa propuesta cosmogónica, si todo es un sistema que domina, una estructura verticalista, una estructura colonialista dónde queda el espacio para aplicar esa sabiduría ancestral, aquí, para mí es reto más grande, para mantener y hablar de lealtad.

It is good to participate [in government]; there are many opportunities [to do so]
in national spaces, in the spaces that the government is granting. But the state is in and of itself a structure of dominance, of discrimination. [And so] to get involved with this system, is it not a way to replicate this domination and discrimination? And if we get involved, where does it leave our universe-centered proposal if we are replicating the dominant system? [The Western system is] a vertical and colonial structure that does not leave room for applying our ancestral knowledge. This is the greatest challenge for me, how to uphold our values and our loyalty [within this structure]. (Virginia Ajxup, July 2007)

The above statement illustrates the messy terrain of applying Indigenous knowledge in Western and Eurocentric, Whitestream systems. How will MIE ever come to flourish, given the colonial history of marginalization, exploitation, and patronizing of Indigenous peoples by the dominant society? Although there is no answer to this question yet, discussions about the nature and place of Indigenous education continue to take place. For example, the 2007 Maya Congress addressed this issue in its community education working group. As part of this working group, I discussed the issue of co-optation and the possibility of implementing Indigenous Education through either the bilingual or the intercultural education program. The participants in the discussion debated and finally came to the conclusion that community education as a system connects Maya Indigenous knowledge to the past and present, and accessing this knowledge from Elders and the cosmos is what best reflects Maya Education.

Maya Indigenous education, therefore, will only become a reality (in my opinion) when communities take it upon themselves to construct the system and not depend on government to provide it. This is not a position welcomed by many people because it involves reifying the failure of government to fulfill its duties to all peoples living in Guatemala, and yet, it seems that the examples of communities that do not rely so much on government for the provision of services have flourished when left on their territories. This is the case of a community that I visited and learned from during my fieldwork. However, the encroachment of multinational, Canadian mining companies is at present putting pressure on the members of that community to demand respect for their collective rights.

The encroachment of a globalized and neoliberal market economy in Guatemala poses a challenge for implementing MIE. It is thus imperative to reconstruct the notion of citizenship using Indigenous Maya concepts into what Cojti Cuxil has suggested should be a multi-national
state derived from the concept of an ethnically diverse nation (2009). The idea of creating a nation state based on the diversity of its population is a suggestion that needs further debate and inquiry. It echoes some of the concerns expressed in this dissertation about the implications of refusing citizenship in a nation-state that does not value Indigenous peoples. It also speaks to the challenges that lie ahead for the realization of self-determination and autonomy. To emphasize this, it is necessary to remember that Indigenous peoples only became citizens after the constitutional reform of 1985. This reform came at a time when the country was beginning its “democratization” phase and engaging in democratic elections for the first time since the military coup in 1982 (Von Hoegen, 1990). The refusal to accept citizenship is an attempt to render Indigenous peoples and philosophies visible to build leadership and relations based on self-determination and autonomy. The participants’ interpretations of the current model of citizenship included the following descriptions:

- always benefits the powerful sectors of the country (Maria Alicia Telón)
- good consumer [and] need to shed Indigenous identity to become Guatemalan first and Maya second (Edgar Choguaj)
- there is no respect for difference (Cleotilde Vásquez)

In short, education in general is seen as a system to provide economic benefits to the groups in power. This position also highlights the insidiousness of material analyses centered on economic gains. Notwithstanding that intolerance for difference and diversity, as material realities faced by Indigenous and other marginalized groups, are important, it is equally important to focus on healing and becoming whole, because anger, envy, competition, low self-esteem, and violence stem from generational injuries to Indigenous peoples’ spirits since colonization. I conclude this chapter with some reflections and thoughts to consider.

**Final Thoughts: Decolonizing Education and Building New Citizens**

The complexities and relationships between nation, citizenship, democracy, and development lead me to the importance of knowledge production. Education, as the center and starting point of imparting, replicating, and producing new knowledge needs to be challenged. The curriculum needs to change to focus on creating critical thinkers who will not only recite and
repeat “facts,” but rather, will be engaged in the decolonizing project of deconstructing colonialism and reconstructing new possibilities. This is crucial work if academics, researchers, practitioners and students are to move away from educational theory that continues to center material discourses that, although alternative frameworks, provide Eurocentric male positions that strengthen the non-Indigenous voices and visions that form the epistemological, ontological, and axiological basis for national laws, policies, projects, and programs. Indigenous Maya education can, therefore, prove that Indigenous peoples can be allies in this process, but do not have to adhere to or begin from positions that are foreign to their own, especially since there is much valid knowledge and wisdom still being lived in Indigenous communities.

Identity and the building of a new model of citizenship, as the participants in this study have demonstrated, cannot be separated. Identity building, as part of the new citizenship project that centers on strengthening Indigenous identity and knowledge, is not something new. Peoples in the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, as well as in Bolivia, Panama, Colombia, and Peru have made strides in this area. In this chapter, I have discussed a few of the characteristics of citizenship that Indigenous Maya peoples in Guatemala are questioning. For the most part, the focus is on creating a citizenship based on spirituality, or placing Creator and the universe at the center, in order to uphold and respect all relations. Second, I have demonstrated that Indigenous Maya peoples, like other Indigenous nations in the world, have suffered from being denied the inherent right to control their lives.

Indigenous Maya peoples have also endured the demonization of spiritual and cultural practices, particularly the use of Indigenous languages, ceremony and forms of organization by the imposition of Western notions of knowledge and value. This has in turn caused much breakdown in individual self-esteem, which has repercussions for the breakdown of the identity of some, even if not all, communities. This situation illustrates the significance of the cultural and political conditions created by an enduring colonial legacy and by a lack of recognition and political autonomy. Therefore, it is clear that the continued strength and sense of worth passed down from Elders and other families that have resisted integration and assimilation into a nation that refuses to take care of its citizens, let alone those who are different and who uphold a collective and specific rights discourse, are at the core of MIE. These examples are what will guide future generations in accepting and respecting difference and truly living in harmony.
Further, in addressing questions of educational relevance, quality, and access in the context of collective and cultural demands, we move away from conservative claims that Indigenous peoples will improve their quality of life when individual members of Indigenous groups improve their material circumstances. This position reflects the posture of most people in Guatemala, who believe that hard work (and study) will always result in an improvement in one’s socioeconomic status (Personal observations, 2007).

The refusal to accept current models of citizenship based on an imagined version of democracy that has theoretically come about since the signing of the PAs in 1996 demonstrates clearly that regardless of the political ideology of the government at the time, Indigenous peoples will always be left out. This exclusion of Indigenous peoples in the nation-state renders participation in its systems to access its safety nets a contested terrain, since the system looks to co-opt them and not give them real power to make any changes and, thus, advance self-determination. The possibilities of applying Indigenous knowledges in various realms of society today provide a contemporary use of ancestral knowledge that leads one to question the imposed systems of governance and being. Centering Indigenous spirituality to advance Indigenous Maya peoples’ political goals as Indigenous requires that education not only includes Indigenous knowledges. It also needs to promote critical thinking, self-reflection, and avenues to challenge so-called traditions and ways of being that contradict Indigenous philosophies, such as walking in balance at the individual and collective levels, in each persons’ families, communities, and the universe. In the next chapter, I provide my summary of the findings as well as proposals for future research.
Chapter 8
Concluding Remarks:
The impact and Challenges of Gendering Maya Indigenous Knowledge

This dissertation has tried to illustrate that the resilience and strength of Maya Indigenous women and men is directly related to their understanding of the importance of Maya Indigenous knowledge. The participants’ stories demonstrate two important issues: On the one hand, that it is possible to continue learning and living Maya Indigenous knowledge regardless of the circumstances and situations that might stand in each person’s way. On the other hand, their stories reflect the heterogeneity of social, spiritual, material, and educational locations that illustrate the dynamic nature of Indigenous cultures and their commitment to bringing back concepts that can transform society positively. Throughout the research, many participants’ examples illustrated that their strength is derived from the resilience of the communities and the ancestral knowledge that guide their proposals to improve the lives of their communities. It also demonstrates that new interdisciplinary dialogues on the validity of developing, applying and validating Indigenous knowledges need to take place, particularly within Latin American Studies, qualitative research and education in Canada and Latin America.

As I sit here trying to write some concluding remarks that will provide hope for the reader, I cannot help but think of the process that I undertook in order to arrive at this moment in time. The day I write this is day 10 N’oj in the Maya Cholq’ij calendar. It is a good day to reflect and create wisdom. My ancestors decided upon important matters on this day; they held council. Metaphorically, I am also holding council with them when I ask for their guidance in my words. Their council guides me to write a reflection upon what I just began and what still needs to be done. This journey began when I was a student without family responsibilities. Now, I am a mother. My little girl represents the future generations and is the reason for my being, for my struggles. I now understand what it means to act respectfully so that future generations will not suffer from the mistakes we made. My hope is that her education, at least at home, will strengthen her Maya Tzotzil and Maya Ach’i identities, with an understanding that the mixed ancestry in my own lineage does not diminish her rights and responsibilities as an Indigenous Maya person.
At the beginning of the research, I felt compelled to investigate the extent of the contributions of Maya peoples to education reform. I have demonstrated here that Indigenous education is a field of importance across the globe, particularly because it questions the knowledge and understandings presented, represented, and authorized in mainstream educational practices. It also broadens the concept of education by positing that education and learning go hand in hand. Thus, education relies on the interplay between lived experience, genetic and collective memory, and the relationship between the student and teacher. My dissertation does not prescribe curriculum. It does not specifically prescribe a particular pedagogy. It does, however raise new questions about the theoretical and epistemological foundations that as academics and educators we choose to employ. It also questions the validity of renewing Indigenous knowledge and apply it in new globalized, interdisciplinary and even transnational contexts. It asks for the development of new coalitions between global Indigenous struggles so Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups may recognize each other and support our decolonizing projects for social justice and balance from distinct locations.

As I have stated, Indigenous education is a necessity for the Mayab’ or Maya territory in Paxil Kayalá, Guatemala given the diversity illustrated through the “21 [vibrant] Maya language groups, [and Mayas that] comprise 60% of the total population” (Tzian, 1994, p. 82). Along with the Xinka and Garífuna (who are of African descent), all Indigenous groups in Guatemala need representation in the education system in order to overcome the influence of the Spanish language and Western education systems upheld and funded by the state. This condition, as I described in the introduction, is a condition prescribed since the 1823 “independence” from Spain. The colonial condition was maintained through Spanish rules, systems, and language to “bring the nation to modernity” (Casaús Arzú, 1992; Cojti Cuxil, 1990, 2002, 2005; Martínez Salazar, 2005). Therefore, Indigenous education proposes to eschew the matrix of oppressions (Collins, 1991) while simultaneously critiquing the shortcoming of liberal democratic thought that denies the situational and contextual variations in intensities of oppressions. These oppressions, I argued, are mostly evident through an analysis of the gendered nature of knowledges, and particularly that of Indigenous Maya knowledges.

In the theoretical background chapter, I delineated how Indigenous education, in general, is based on an epistemology comprised of the stories found in ancient texts, oral tradition,
everyday lived experiences, and the values and understandings inherent in our relationships with the land and universe (Battiste, 1986, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c; Cajete, 1994; CNEM, 2004; Dei, 1995, 2000, 2002, 2008, 2011; Ermine, 1995; Holmes, 2000; Jiménez Estrada, 2005). It became evident how Indigenous knowledges, in their philosophical propositions, connect the notion of balance to all areas in society, particularly in the ways that gender balance is not an addition to the cultural values of the Maya, but rather, is intrinsic to its worldview. The implications for constructing an education system that does not exclude girls and women from accessing it, nor erase the Grandmother’s knowledge in its contents is a goal compatible with concepts such as the *Jun Winaq*. As a central unit of analysis for discussing the gendered nature of Indigenous knowledges and the impact it had on the research process, the *Jun Winaq* provided the opportunity for the participants’ recommendations to flourish, particularly because they understand the contributions of my research is limited. However, their support and conviction that proposing a Maya concept for finding balance in gender relations, education and social organization highlights the contributions of Maya peoples to society in general. For this purpose, I purposely relied on Indigenous scholars and academics that espouse Indigenous approaches to research and knowledge production. I also relied on academics and activists who have published about the Maya movements and Indigenous struggles in their roles as allies. To this end, the literature cited is an indication of my own goal as an Indigenous academic to bridge conversations amongst Indigenous communities across Abya Yala and the world, with non-Indigenous communities. It is also my intent to highlight the need for academic units such as Latin American studies to consider the validity of Indigenous knowledges and frameworks in academic endeavors.

The case of Maya Education in Guatemala reveals the myriad ways in which the Indigenous experiences of distinct peoples around the world intersect in their engagement with colonization and decolonization. I opted to highlight areas that link Indigenous struggles for self-determination, particularly through evidence of the way in which Indigenous and “othered” knowledge systems often are excluded from academic and policy conversations, and rarely benefit Indigenous populations. This situation is not unique to Guatemala and yet, there are profound differences between nations who reside in so-called developed regions versus developing ones. However, it is no surprise that the status of Guatemala as a developing nation is not only due to its vast richness in socio-ecological diversity. It is equally important to note that
First Nations peoples in Canada who reside in resource-rich areas face similar predicaments in terms of experiencing the different dimensions of poverty. These issues affect Indigenous peoples that live in material poverty because the dynamics between the state institutions and their demands for improved political, economic, social and cultural rights often determine life and death. Valuing Indigenous knowledge thus becomes not merely a discursive call to decolonization. It is also about protecting Indigenous lives today and tomorrow. Linda Tuhiwai-Smith (2005) elaborates further:

“Decolonizing research, then, is not simply about challenging or making refinements to qualitative research. It is a much broader but still purposeful agenda for transforming the institutions of research, the deep underlying structure and taken-for-granted ways of organizing, conducting, and disseminating research and knowledge” (p. 88).

Socio-economics and demographics aside, the issue at hand is that no matter where a researcher bases its context, the reality remains that education systems are implicated in validating knowledge through research practices. Therefore, the need to develop and conduct academic work from culturally and epistemologically relevant research methodologies are important aspects of not only contesting but also advancing the critical analysis of mainstream, Western education systems about the knowledge centers validated and those that are excluded. Negotiating, collecting, interpreting, and disseminating information are all aspects of a research process that produce knowledge. If everyday experience and interrelationships are paramount in Indigenous education, then most Western notions that separate the researcher from the research contradict the premise upon which Indigenous education is founded. Herein lies the promise of working from distinct epistemological foundations.

For Maya Indigenous education, the issues of addressing and changing current dominant Western research methodologies cannot be separated. Further, it is also important to remember that no knowledge, culture, and field of inquiry are static. I recognize the critical advances made recently within mainstream sociological and political canons to look within themselves in an effort to recognize that Eurocentrism as an ideological foundation needs further dismantling from the inside. However, as the stakes rise in terms of solutions to end gendered, racialized and
colonial oppressions, it is timely that Indigenous knowledge can provide an avenue for analyzing and finding each person’s culturally and epistemologically grounded ways in which to heal.

I once again honor the spirits of the Mississauga territory where my little girl was born. I also want to honor the Grandmothers and Grandfathers of the Maya territory where I was born. I posit throughout this dissertation that Indigenous education applies Indigenous knowledge systems in research and education as an exercise in remembering Indigenous Maya ancestors. My remembering thus implied getting to know my own territory again. I had to put the pieces back together and build community at home. I had to understand the complex issues that challenge, prevent, and inspire Indigenous Maya professionals working towards building an education system that will honor our ancestors. For this, I had to know their stories. I had to share my own journey in order to open a door to interact at a personal level, and that meant building trust, reciprocity, and respect. I also had to observe and participate in the complex social relations involved in working within a system that professes equality toward Indigenous peoples and yet annihilates us slowly with its lack of action and political will to let Indigenous peoples decide how, when, where, and with what tools to shape our future.

It is interesting to note that many of the participants are still heavily involved with the ministry in reforming education, specifically its curriculum. Their contributions are clearly present in the new national curriculum for Grades 4–6, in both its objectives and its contents. As I reviewed this document, I could not help but see the words of each participant reflected in it. For example, the document says that:

It centers the student as a human being […] it is organized into themes that seek to reflect the kind of citizens they wish to become. As a strategy, it seeks to form multicultural, respectful citizens so each of the four cultures living in the country can exercise their civil and democratic rights … and develop more skills to enable the students to participate in the workforce. (MINEDUC, 2005, p. 15)

I am aware of the contentious use of loaded terms such as respect, democratic, rights, and respectful citizens. The reality of the country just does not reflect this ideal written on paper. Moreover, the ideal came from the Maya Proposals for Educational Reform. There is a general consensus among the participants that the MPER forms the basis for the current National Base Curriculum destined to contextualize and decentralize education in Guatemala. As Poppema
(2009) has illustrated, the commitments made to education reform through the signing of the Peace Accords have remained largely on paper and are still unknown to many. Faced with this challenge, I tried to illustrate in this dissertation that the addition of certain elements of Maya culture to the curriculum, and based on the MPER, do not reflect Indigenous knowledge, pedagogy, or educational perspectives. I posit that this is specifically true in the areas of knowledge production, gender equity, cultural practices, and notions of citizenship. These are also four areas where the government is still falling short of fulfilling its promises to create an education system that will increase and improve access to traditionally marginalized communities and groups in their “Education for All” slogan in exchange for an education, “formulated towards processes of economic globalization and designed ‘to respond to demands of an open global economy [whereby] the Government of Guatemala has proposed a strategy for improving human capital based upon the expansion of the skill level of the labor force’” (World Bank, 1997a, as cited in Poppema, 2009, p. 392).

In light of the fact that the Maya Proposals for Educational Reform have been ignored and, to an extent, manipulated in an attempt to create the appearance of a country willing to respect and implement its commitments to a peace and rebuilding process, this research set out to highlight the perceptions of Maya professional women and men regarding not only their participation in education and reform, but also the ways in which they live out Indigenous Maya knowledge today and the congruency with Elders’ and sacred books’ teachings about women’s traditional roles in the face of colonization and patriarchy (Cunningham, 2006; Deerchild, 2003; Ouellette, 2002; Smith, 2005, 2007, 2008, 2011). It is equally important to remember that exclusion is “not an Indian tradition” (Smith, 2003).

In this dissertation I intentionally connected the stories of the participants about their experiences in education—whether in their schooling experiences, or more recent experiences as advocates of Maya Indigenous knowledge. This approach allowed me to further question the “official” education system in Guatemala, even after the reforms. I used this analysis to illustrate that colonialism and its foundations continue to negatively affect Indigenous Maya peoples today. This occurs when Indigenous Maya knowledge and peoples are presented as having deficits. In turn, I wanted to focus on a more constructive approach that brings hope for transformation. This transformation proposes that Indigenous knowledges and philosophies are
alive and can change society for the better. This position also honors the goals of the participants and of the communities who are tired of discourses describing the challenges facing Indigenous Maya peoples today in terms of their victimization. There are also proposals and positive stories that highlight that Indigenous Maya knowledge is still alive today through its descendants who are proactive at maintaining their identity in spite of the daily challenges. Therefore, presenting examples of how Indigenous Maya peoples are re-righting history is important. The youth also need to know there are positive aspects to their culture. There is also “another” side of the “official” Western story: Indigenous Maya peoples are still alive. Maya ancestral philosophies and knowledge provide a way to overcome challenges and provide hope for positive transformation.

The introduction set the tone by stating that certain aspects of Maya Indigenous knowledge—as understood and lived by the participants—have kept them alive. It is thus important to note the connection between these elements and the elements found in the MPER, because they are living and vibrant knowledges that need to be included in Indigenous education for the maintenance and survival of Maya culture. This section also attempted to provide the background that justifies the efforts to construct an education system that meets the needs of the Maya, Xinka, Garífuna, and non-Indigenous groups that coexist in the country without dividing the country. The perception that Indigenous peoples’ demands are dividing the country along racial and cultural lines is an ideology that governments, as well as non-Indigenous peoples, claim is the basis of Indigenous education. To demystify this perception, I have shown how Indigenous Maya knowledge and education can actually bring to light certain elements that can improve society for the benefit of all. The argument that Indigenous peoples are demanding “special treatment” is at the core of many conservative and reactionary sectors of society who wish to undermine and also dismiss the important contributions Indigenous knowledge has made in society. This perspective is related to the argument that Indigenous peoples are no longer vibrant and important in society and therefore have nothing valuable to contribute: this is therefore about the politics of knowledge production. The politics of knowledge production determine who gets to speak on whose behalf and what knowledges are deemed valid or not (Dei, 2011; Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2001; Dei & Kempf, 2006).
In Chapter 2, I opted to focus on the history of Guatemala and the impact of this history on the participants. It illustrates how the inequities are overcome by the participants through inward journeys of reflection and knowledge seeking. It also provided a framework from which to understand their demands. For example, when Ana Ventura tells her story about Indigenous women in the communities who are not actively participating in the affairs of the communities because men keep them at home, we get a glimpse of how colonial impositions have distorted both Indigenous identity constructions and gender relations. It is evident that the treatment of Western women at home in Europe has become the standard for treatment of Indigenous women by Indigenous men. This story suggests that there is a great need to reclaim and remember that Maya culture thrived on the participation of both men and women and that this is an important ideal to strive for. It also demonstrates that we still have a long journey, especially since we also need to heal our spirits from the wounds of colonization. No one can do the work each person has to do for her or himself. But education can play a significant part by sharing our philosophies and address the ways in which colonization has devalued, dehumanized, and discarded our knowledge.

In light of this pressing issue, it is important, then, to note that part of the new National Curriculum Framework proposed by the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) purports to make the contents flexible so that teachers can adapt them to their context and the realities of the children in their classrooms. However, it is important to note that a lack of teacher training in Indigenous pedagogies or even on how to implement the new National Base Curriculum poses a barrier to the transformation of education. Therefore, imagining the creation and accessibility of a decolonized way to address the historical factors that have contributed to Indigenous Maya peoples’ present-day conditions seems far from attainable. However, there is hope. For example, the participants each shared how they try to make a difference from their positions as professionals. Regarding how to address the concept of gender balance, María Alicia Telón shared her opinion about who is responsible to develop the materials used for teaching the modules as well as for teacher training:

Sí, políticamente … legalmente ya se puede también porque ya están las bases. Le voy a compartir el Acuerdo Ministerial 35-2005 que es donde nos dice que podemos nosotros contextualizar los contenidos. Solamente que el cómo y el quién, no lo dice. Pero ya con eso es suficiente para nosotros para ir
contextualizando la educación. Ahorita, es la negociación sobre los tiempos y en qué momento se incorporan, quién es el responsable de desarrollar esos contenidos para que se incorporen y para que el maestro pueda hacerlo. … Entonces, como le digo, legalmente se puede y se está haciendo. Técnicamente también se está haciendo, política y financieramente no hay ningún apoyo. No lo hay. Entonces otra vez, llegará a un sector pero no a todos. [Ahora] están viendo la posibilidad de revisar tres propuestas de contextualización que existen en el país. Una de ellas es la que hizo PROEMBI y PROEIMCA. Entonces, lo van a analizar y si es posible se hará una propuesta a nivel nacional de cual modalidad se utilizará o si es que pasan las tres modalidades de forma de incorporación de los conocimientos y saberes indígenas. Entonces así tenemos avanzado un pequeño diálogo. Pero en un año electoral no creo que vayamos a avanzar nada; pero por lo menos ya tenemos lineamientos de cómo hacer EBI en el país y cómo se puede hacer también la contextualización a nivel Ministerial. Entonces, ya son documentos que yo creo que amparan el “cómo hacerlo”. Ahora quiénes lo hacen, y con qué son problemas porque nadie se responsabiliza. El qué y el cómo casi están resueltos pero la responsabilidad real, nadie la asume.

[At a] political [level] … and legally, it can be done because its conceptual basis is there. I will share with you what Ministerial Accord 35-2005 says about who has the power to contextualize the contents [of the New National Curriculum]. The only downfall is that it does not specify who is responsible for doing it and how it will be done. It is now a matter of time before they can decide who will be responsible for developing the teaching materials and also how teachers will teach them. [But] we have the legal base to do this. We also have the technical know-how, but there is a problem and that has to do with the political will to fund this [the development and training of the materials to implement the new curriculum]. There is none. Therefore, [the New Curriculum] will reach specific sectors, but not all. There are now discussions regarding three proposals made by PROEMBI and PROEIMCA regarding how to address the gender issue from Indigenous Maya perspectives and I hope there will be positive answers soon and we can move forward. But, because this year is an election year, I don’t think that much will be done. But at least we have the guidelines of how to implement bilingual intercultural education in the country and also how to contextualize the contents based on the regions and communities at a Ministry level. Therefore, these are documents that allow us to define “how to do this”. Now, in terms of who will actually do this [develop the contents and materials] we don’t know who will assume this responsibility. (María Alicia Telón, March 2, 2007)
The crux of the problem, based on this analysis, rests on determining how to best implement Indigenous Maya knowledge in the actual education system. There are two key issues here. The first one relates to whether the state and mainstream Western education will ever be able to fully engage indigenous Maya learners when it only adds some Maya elements to its curriculum to acknowledge and celebrate the diversity of peoples in Guatemala without addressing issues of power and control. Second, if the issue is that the state will never fully do justice to the indigenous Maya knowledge found in the MIE, then the questions that educators need to discuss further are: Where does MIE belong? Does it belong in community? Does it belong in a separate system? These issues are highly contested and controversial, especially in light of the political and social barriers that prevent the Indigenous majority in Guatemala to hold positions of power in order to implement policies, programs, and laws to include Maya Indigenous knowledge in a respectful and meaningful way. Therefore, when participants stated that the State’s minimal attempt to value and impart Indigenous knowledge is a tokenistic way of addressing larger structural and systemic issues that prevent Indigenous peoples from gaining self-determination, they raise this conundrum: How to address the educational needs of diverse learners in a manner that is respectful and that shows the government’s political will to adequately fund and increase access and quality education for all? This complex question necessitates discussion and a commitment to train policy makers and other government officials to assume the responsibility of developing ways to make education more inclusive and diverse.

The participants’ positions range from a lack of confidence that the Ministry of Education will even do their part to develop, print, and distribute adequate teaching materials for the teachers to implement the new curriculum. They are even less sure that more intercultural-bilingual teachers will be properly trained. I can only suggest that this issue not only stems from a lack of interest in Indigenous culture, knowledge, and peoples, it also illustrates the state’s unwillingness to allow full participation of and meaningful contributions from Indigenous communities, educators, experts, and leaders. Therefore, the concept of the Jun Winaq’ could contribute to a dialogue to discuss that, “first meeting of two disparate world-views, each on its own uncharted course of exploration and discovery for purposeful knowledge” (Ermine, 1995, p. 101). To this day, the issue of the lack of materials to support the implementation of the new curriculum that would support the inclusion of Indigenous Maya knowledge in the public
education system continues. This dissertation did not touch upon this issue, but it is certainly an important one worthy of inquiry not only to understand how Maya Indigenous knowledge is taken up in these materials, but also how it is transmitted to teachers in their training. It will be interesting to see what aspects of Maya Indigenous knowledge are selected for inclusion in the curriculum, and also if their application and transmission reflect the understandings and applications Indigenous Maya peoples intended.

The example of the lack of political will to implement or further develop materials that value Indigenous Maya knowledge is also embedded in colonial relations since contact with the Spanish colonizers. Therefore, I felt that understanding colonial influence is important in showing how education has been central to the marginalization of Indigenous peoples through controlling what knowledges are taught at school. Education also contributes to the creation of stereotypes of Indigenous peoples as frozen in time and our knowledge as irrelevant to present-day society while simultaneously racially segregating Indigenous from non-Indigenous groups. As shown in many of the stories shared by the participants, the damage done to us through Western education is still there, and so investing in developing Indigenous education based on our Indigenous systems of knowledge is a way to heal from these wounds. For the Indigenous and non-Indigenous readers, it is also important to see that decolonizing education does not involve ghettoizing or creating further divisions between Indigenous peoples and others. In fact, it promotes and strengthens respect for each group’s identity.

**Implications of applying Indigenous Knowledge in Education**

In this dissertation, I focused on the efforts made by organizations, such as the Consejo Nacional de Educación Maya / National Council for Maya Education (CNEM), who contribute immensely to the development of Indigenous conceptualizations of education (CNEM, 1996, 1998, 2000, 2004a, 2004b). These illustrate that it is possible to attain *intellectual self-determination* (Battiste, 2002, p. 61, note 4) through the concerted efforts of Indigenous academics who work with their communities to develop new analyses and methodologies that aim to decolonize individuals, communities, and institutions. These efforts exemplify Indigenous resistance to colonial systems of administration across Abya Yala (the Americas). This has
occurred since the imposition of the Spanish, French, and British colonial states, and answers the need to reclaim and privilege Indigenous knowledges and epistemologies.

As an academic attempting to bring Indigenous theories, perspectives, voices, and teachings to the fore, I chose to base the theoretical framework guiding this story upon Indigenous knowledges, specifically on theories that are emerging from the Indigenous humanities (Battiste, 2004; Battiste, Bell, I. Findley, M. Findley & Youngblood Henderson, 2005). This choice is particularly relevant because it is my position that one of the goals of Maya Indigenous education is to demonstrate that Indigenous knowledge is relevant to many contexts. Indigenous knowledge centers the concept of self-in-relation (Graveline, 1998) and the inward journey of self-reflection as valid ways of organizing and guiding scholarly works that place importance not only on the product itself (the dissertation) but also on the processes that led up to its realization. This approach is invaluable in a context such as Maya Indigenous education in Guatemala, where attaining the status of an expert—whether one identifies as Indigenous or not—means quoting Western theorists and using methodological frameworks that do not correspond to Indigenous epistemology, axiology, and ontology. Therefore, in light of the universalist and standardized models of education that have plagued Guatemala, the task of validating multiple centers of knowledge (Dei, 2000; Dei, Hall & Rosenberg, 2000) becomes not only a political pursuit, but also one that seeks the preservation of these knowledges for the survival of Indigenous peoples. Indigenous Maya education has the potential to break this divide.

To continue the work of many scholars who have argued for the need to decolonize education in order to create systems that foster multiple centers of knowledge (Dei, 1995, 2000, 2008, 2011; Shahjahan, 2004, 2005) and value specific contexts (Battiste, 1998, 2000; Thaman, 2003; L. T. Smith, 1999, 2005; Weber-Pillwax, 1999; Wilson, 2003, 2008), this dissertation utilized a decolonizing framework and strategy in its theoretical foundations for use during the research and writing process. I relied on the Indigenous Humanities as my theoretical framework, as well as George Dei’s Indigenous discursive framework, whereby he addresses global Indigenous knowledges as valid centers of knowledge and units of analyses for academic work. Dei’s work provides a unique lens through which to ground and analyze the colonial foundations of education in Guatemala, including the theoretical canons educational and sociological researchers rely on. Further, his work speaks to contemporary issues affecting
Indigenous peoples at a global scale. While Dei locates himself as African Canadian, he also asserts Indigenous theoretical perspectives that provided the means through which I teased out not only the tensions but also the convergences in decolonization efforts and visions. Indeed, I stated that as Indigenous peoples, we must understand that our similarities unite us and our differences allow us to engage in ways that differentiate us from mainstream Euro-American, ethnocentric cultures. Therefore, as Dei (2011) states, “to claim the ‘Indigenous’ is not an end in itself. It is simply a means to an end, that is, decolonization” (p. 11).” This particular theoretical foundation in educational research and studies is not widely known, validated or utilized in Latin America. My work aims to open up these conversations or follow them up if they are already happening. The aim of this strategy was to address, name, and discuss some parameters and elements considered necessary by scholars in the Indigenous education field globally to decolonize education. Connecting to these debates at a global level is also part of a “knowledge sharing” (Hampton, 1995) strategy to foster research that will support culturally relevant education for Indigenous peoples specifically, but not exclusively, in Guatemala.

The Ceiba is a metaphor that I used to guide and organize this dissertation. The methodology pointed to the importance of walking with respect, balance, interdependence, reciprocity, and cooperation and the usefulness of understanding cycles. Throughout, I had to refer to my own story because I am not an absent actor in this research. Therefore, personal location became a fundamental element in understanding the epistemological basis for Indigenous research and also education. This is because taking account of the researcher’s location challenges the Cartesian premise that mind and body are separate and therefore objectivity is possible (Battiste, 2000a, 2001, 2002; Cajete, 1994; Castellano 2000; Dei, 2000, 2008, 2011; Dei, Hall & Rosenberg, 2000; Ermine, 1995; Semali & Kincheloe, 1999; L. T. Smith, 1999, 2005).

In this section of concluding thoughts, the model I propose illustrates the elements that we continue to press to include in education because they represent the living and vibrant knowledge that, while adapting to changing contexts, maintains our integrity and wholeness as Indigenous Maya peoples. The elements to be included in Maya Indigenous education stem from the needs and perspectives of the local communities where education takes place. In addition, for
education of any kind to be effective, appropriate curricular materials, trained educators and an adequate budget are required.

**Proposed Contributions to Indigenous and Native Studies**

Throughout this journey, I addressed questions of research methodology in both content and form. As such, the process privileged literature and knowledge produced by and written from Indigenous perspectives (Thaman, 2003, p. 13) in the field of education while recognizing the important contributions of scholars who are attempting to work within a decolonizing framework as allies (Bastos & Camús, 2003a, 2003b; Carey Jr., 2004, 2006, 2011; Casaús Arzú, 1992, Fischer & Brown, 1996; Mignolo, 2005; Mohanty, 2003; Quijano, 2009; Said, 1978; Smith, 1990; Taracena Arriola, 1997, 2002; Warren, 1998). The need to refer to non-Indigenous scholars is a reality in Guatemala because, although Indigenous scholars are growing in numbers, there are still many factors that continue to keep our numbers low in comparison with non-Indigenous educators and academics. There is also the reality that Indigenous frameworks and theories are not widely recognized or accepted in the academy.

Indigenous theorizing and analyses are areas not widely addressed, particularly in the context of Indigenous peoples in Latin America. In seeking to apply a theoretical framework that made sense for the participants I was going against the grain by not fitting my research into an already established theoretical lens—a lens that would not capture the complexity of the issues related to education in Guatemala. Therefore, I offer this dissertation as a way to center Maya Indigenous knowledge and concepts in an interdisciplinary approach to construct theoretical frameworks and units of analysis to further advance Indigenous knowledge. Such an endeavor contrasts with the fragmented way in which Indigenous knowledge is now included in the National Base Curriculum in Guatemala. I have demonstrated that the debate about the rightful place for Indigenous Maya Education points to the dilemma of how to respectfully implement Indigenous Knowledge in education responsibly. This is due to the (correct) assumption that Indigenous Maya peoples need to decide and agree upon how they want to construct and manage their education system.
For example, I discussed in Chapter 5 how re-centering ancestral knowledge in education is important, as it is part of daily life. I tried to illustrate that both Indigenous women and men have a responsibility to acknowledge and value the feminine side of Creation, as it is in Maya values and teachings. This reclaiming of Grandmother’s knowledge led to a discussion of the concept of the *Jun Winaq*, which, according to the participants, is a more appropriate term to use to discuss gender relations. And although, as illustrated by the stories of the participants, the concept of the *Jun Winaq* is an ideal to strive for, it is nevertheless no less important than the ideal of gender equity—albeit a very different concept.

My understanding of Indigenous Maya conceptualizations of gender is that Indigenous Maya women are not trying to take the role of men or claim that gender roles are static. Reclaiming ancestral ways of being promotes the choice each person has in aligning herself or himself as necessary. This too is a strategy for the survival of future generations. The fight for Indigenous peoples’ survival, particularly for Indigenous women, should not imply the exclusion of discussions about gender and gender violence from our distinct locations with Indigenous men or Western feminists. Discussing gender issues from culturally grounded concepts, like the *Jun Winaq* opens up the possibility to engage in these discussions and propose solutions based on the distinct context and values of the communities where these discussions take place. These conversations are important because they seek to find balance. This balance implies that gendered, racialized and classed power differentials need to be changed. Maya philosophy and ways of being offer this.

The discussion about balancing power differentials has many implications for policy makers, especially when Indigenous peoples are voicing their concerns and propositions for designing policies that affect the well-being of Indigenous women and men. The stories shared here illustrate that Indigenous Maya women are resilient and capable in their own ways to gather the strength needed to overcome barriers if allowed to live from their own epistemological positions. Living in balance does not negate that issues of social exclusion, violence and oppression affect Indigenous women differently, or that all Indigenous women ascribe to this particular view of fighting oppressions. However, it does highlight the nonuniversality of Indigenous knowledge. As Indigenous women, we should decide for ourselves how we will use our knowledge to mitigate the effects of an imbalanced and unjust world, whether the issue is
gendered or racialized injustice. The same goes for Indigenous men. The point is that both women and men have the responsibility to engage in individual healing work in order to collectively heal our nations.

The concept of balance and imbalance is central to addressing inequalities. As discussed in Chapter 7, the application of the concepts and guidance of the sacred Maya calendar, the Tzolk’in, in traditional leadership and education is an approach that can alleviate the power struggles that occur in “democratic” approaches to governance and leadership models. This chapter was especially difficult to write, given that there is much knowledge that could be misinterpreted or appropriated and misused. I state that there is a possibility for misunderstanding, because I am taking stories that the participants have translated from their languages into Spanish and I am then interpreting through my lenses, first in Spanish and then into English. I am also in the process of understanding our philosophy and knowledge and thus, also of understanding clearly the proposals for restructuring the state.

Because one of the issues analyzed, the creation of a new kind of citizenship, is based on traditional ways of electing leadership and the sacred knowledge of the Tzolk’in, there is a danger of oversimplifying the issues. This oversimplification can be read as an inadequate understanding of the concepts involved and thus, as a mere addition of concepts like spirituality to the dissertation. Therefore, I am aware that writing about Indigenous ways of knowing and organization has its limits and dangers. However, I could not ignore the importance of writing in the spiritual dimension of Indigenous Maya knowledge, as it is central to the participants’ lives. It is also central to the philosophical and epistemological makeup of Maya culture. Thus, the discussion about creating a new kind of leaderships, and thus, creating a new kind of nation, has the potential to provide grounds for discussion regarding the need to continue working within the state apparatus or creating autonomous zones whereby self-determination can be achieved. These are serious conversations that need to take place inside communities.

To follow this line of thinking, Chapter 7 discussed some of the details of how MIE is a site that has the potential for building new strong citizens of a Maya Nation. I did this using the participants’ opinions regarding the characteristics of the new citizen. One of the most important aspects of this is that this citizenship is centered on Creator and thus makes everyone
accountable for his or her actions. This goes hand in hand with the Indigenous axiology that says that human beings are all interdependent. It promotes a certain unity that fosters collaboration to maintain balance. The knowledge produced through the participants’ stories point to two significant contributions of this dissertation to the field of Indigenous education and methodology. The application of a research methodology specifically based on Maya Indigenous epistemology is a valid way of guiding and conducting research. Particularly for this dissertation, it worked well to reach its goal: to contribute to the struggle to validate Indigenous Maya knowledge and also to build an education system that values and builds strong Maya Indigenous citizens. Second, based on the knowledge contained in the participants’ stories, this dissertation has analyzed ways to decolonize education and also learn from standpoints that value both Grandmother’s and Grandfather’s ways/knowledge. Both propositions are important discussions that need further exploration.

These approaches to research propose a reconceptualization of the elements of value in Indigenous Maya knowledge first, and second propose a guide to make education and gender relations more balanced: the concept of reclaiming Grandmother’s Knowledge to balance the relationship between human beings to each other and to Mother Earth through the concept of Jun Winaq. As demonstrated throughout, this concept attests to the gendered nature of Indigenous Maya knowledge and the need to discuss the material and metaphysical connections that tie everyone together in the universe. These contributions, of course, need further discussion and development with more communities and especially with Maya Elders.

Implications for Local Maya Communities

As previously stated, the dissertation had two particular goals. One was to present the Ceiba (Tree of Life) as an example of Maya Indigenous knowledge and values that encompasses the guiding principles for conceptualizing and carrying out the research for this dissertation (theory and methodology), as well as for its organization. In doing this, I attempted to illustrate that the Ceiba is a metaphor for the concept of self-in-relation (Graveline, 1998) that positions the researcher as well as the communities where the research takes place as accountable for his or her actions and omissions in the research.
Centering Indigenous knowledge has the objective of validating points of view and granting further legitimacy to Indigenous peoples’ claims for justice. Education is a goal that is pursued by all governments and the education of Indigenous peoples has been at the forefront of many international policies, treaties, and agreements as proposed by the United Nations. In spite of all of the rhetoric about implementing ways through which Indigenous peoples can have autonomy in deciding how to make their education systems, the truth is, as illustrated by Guatemala, that there are many challenges to first, construct and further develop these systems, and second, to implement them with the adequate human and financial resources. This work intends to assist in the discussions relevant to the creation of an education system within the state apparatus, as much as it is helpful in discussing a Maya education system outside of it.

The challenge in validating Indigenous peoples’ knowledge is mainly one of political will. First, I have illustrated that for the Indigenous Maya professionals who participated in this research, the knowledge passed on to them through stories and praxis came from their parents and grandparents, Elders, and from the spiritual world through ceremony and dreams. I have acknowledged and privileged the ways in which these sites produce knowledge and make meaning of life, and describe the relational processes that have taken thousands of years to learn through careful observation of and living on Maya territory. Not all of the knowledge passed orally is applicable today, and teaching children how to make it their own through applying it in their own contexts and situations is a tool that will allow them to solve problems, whatever they might be.

It is important to recognize that Indigenous knowledge and its keepers are experts. If the political will to accept this existed, then perhaps the divide between those who speak for Indigenous peoples and those who actually facilitate their projects and programs would be erased. Remuneration and respect for Indigenous knowledge and its keepers would also make a change in the poverty statistics and could potentially bring Indigenous peoples out of at least two of the forms of poverty described here: the material and the spiritual. At the material level, paying experts for their work would increase their income, alleviating material needs. Acknowledging and respecting their knowledge also has the potential to increase self-esteem and show younger generations that their perspectives and way of life contributes the improvement of life on this planet and in the spiritual realm.
Further Research

The contributions described above demonstrate that this research has many limitations, in part because it focused on the depth of knowledge of a small group of Indigenous experts living in the city who have been engaged in education reform in direct or indirect ways. Therefore, a next step to validate a model proposed here for Maya Indigenous education necessitates that other researchers take up the challenge to engage in collective efforts to understand and apply concepts inherent to Maya peoples based on their context. This would mean that more research is needed to understand and help Maya communities agree on the conceptual terms, language of instruction, and components of Maya Education. It also means that serious discussions about the inclusion of Indigenous Maya knowledge in education must take place: Is it enough? What are the most pressing educational issues? Can solutions come through reforms or does the conversation need to go in the direction of autonomous regions and self-government? What conceptual tools are needed to attain this? Who will develop them and how will they be applied? All of these questions reflect the need to broaden the scope of the research. Although I found little information about the educational strategies that would be used to validate Maya Indigenous knowledge during my field research, one thing became clear: we need more scholars and activists willing to work from their own epistemological standpoints. This situation is even more critical for Indigenous peoples in Spanish-speaking countries in Latin America, particularly because Indigenous research methodologies or theories have yet to be developed and applied in their academic contexts.

On this point, it is important to explain that connecting Indigenous peoples at a global level through knowledge exchanges has the potential to break the stereotypes passed down through Western education systems. For example, I have met Indigenous Maya peoples who refuse to engage with Indigenous peoples from North America because of the fact they speak English. I have also encountered Native peoples in Canada who question the reason I do not speak my language, or that believe blood quantum is the only characteristic connecting Indigenous communities. These gross generalizations only elucidate the need for contemporary Indigenous peoples to engage with one another and propose ways in which they envision the future of their own communities. These discussions have the potential to provide tools and information that might be helpful to other communities who are at different stages of negotiation
with the state, or that might be well on their way of creating research and educational institutions based on their distinct cultures and languages, like the Maori.

One proposal to consider is to create a repository of key documents that have been central to justifying the use and application of Indigenous knowledge. Translating these documents into Spanish initially, and eventually into different Mayan languages, to include them in an open access catalogue destined for Indigenous groups wanting to preserve and share their knowledge with other groups could be a valuable endeavor. This could facilitate more knowledge exchanges with North American Indigenous groups in order to discuss goals, strategies, and ways of making the culture vibrant. For example, reclaiming artistic expressions of knowledge for informing the curriculum as expressed in weaving would contribute to the acknowledgment that this activity is still relevant today and also that it holds ancestral knowledge and skills relevant to today’s world. Moreover, if the international cooperation sector is interested in assisting Indigenous peoples to become agents for our own futures, I believe they too would have to learn more about Indigenous ethical protocols and cultural safety nets, which would help them decide whether to participate in certain projects and/or to direct them from their own goals and perceptions of how these communities could benefit.

Finally, at a time when First Nations peoples and the Crown are renegotiating their relationship in Canada, I believe it is timely to discuss the implications of developing social systems inside and outside of government. An issue that becomes clear from this dissertation is the necessity for government to show willingness to give up the power and economic privileges acquired through the genocide of Indigenous peoples. In other words, what would negotiation look like if Indigenous peoples and government have different agendas? How does this affect educational reform and outcomes? Using reports of the experience of the First Nations in Canada, it would be beneficial to Indigenous Maya peoples and other groups in the region of Latin America to hold roundtables and discussions to develop strategies for developing governance in their own contexts.
Concluding Thoughts

Maya Indigenous cultural knowledge is alive. It is not dead. Contemporary Maya are not dead and are not failed remnants of an ancient civilization. Maya Indigenous knowledge can contribute to changing society and the proposal for the inclusion of that knowledge in the education system so that younger and future generations might highlight what the other cultures need to do to strengthen theirs. If a respectful exchange of knowledge is to take place, each culture needs to know who they are and where they are coming from in order to know where they are going. As academics interested in decolonization and self-determination, we need to also reflect upon how we are complicit in devaluing our own knowledges. Such hurts injure the spirit and will continue to divide Indigenous peoples along economic, racial, gender, and national lines.

I have spoken from my heart, guided by my hope, blood memory, and attempt to honor the stories of the participants in their engagement with education, from their challenges to their proposals for further developing its contents and advocating for its application in its fragmented way through educational reform. The new curriculum, as proposed in the educational reform, has the potential to at least start exposing children to the contributions and importance of Maya Indigenous knowledge today. But these proposals also have the potential to create different education systems that stem from community and are kept in community. The two approaches are equally valuable.

As I write these final words, I am aware that new conversations are taking place. I am also aware that the funding and political will of those in power still fall short of delivering on the government’s minimal commitment to Indigenous peoples and to the country in general. There are many implications of taking up these recommendations for policy makers, researchers, funding institutions, and educational administrators. However, it is important to understand that Indigenous Maya knowledge is alive and relevant to address contemporary issues in diverse societies like Guatemala. It also illustrates the transformative power of looking into one’s own history and engagement with colonization and its ideologies to change the face of injustice. I propose that each society can do the same to address its own issues. For Indigenous peoples in a global context, the point that connects us is a holistic view of the universe, respect for difference
and a reverence for that spiritual force we call Creator. It is also important to recognize the value of Indigenous knowledge keepers and to remunerate them accordingly, because another aspect of pursuing education is to improve our very material, social conditions that keep the majority of the Indigenous population impoverished. There are Indigenous experts in each of our Indigenous communities, and it is time to honor them and thank them for their contributions in a real way.

Finally, I have included a graphic of the proposal for a model of MIE based on the findings and also on the metaphor of the Ceiba. These elements can guide future research, specifically in terms of funding more research that will work with Maya Indigenous communities to decide the concepts and contents they want to see in community-based indigenous education. The concept of Jun Winaq’ is one that plays an important role in the research and it is also recommended that it be used instead of gender. Jun Winaq’ also merits more research with the participation of Indigenous Maya peoples.

All my relations. Kin k'amowaj kamul oxmlul. I give thanks two, three times.
Grandmothers’/Grandfathers’ Knowledge

- Gifts and destiny of the individual according to the Maya Calendar
- Spirituality and ceremony at the center, tapping into knowledge
- Values: respect, reciprocity, honesty, balance, unity, cooperation, humility, reverence, and diversity learned at home and community

*Figure 8.* Maya education model based on Ceiba/Tree of Life.
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256


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Appendix A
Interview Guide

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1. Name
2. Linguistic group and place of birth
3. Current education and brief history of how engaged with system
4. Situation of Maya Women: How does own experience reflect/not reflect that of most Maya women in the country?
5. As a public figure, how do you believe you inspire younger Maya women to continue valuing their identity and also the different Nations living in Guatemala?
6. How are you perceived in your community based on the work you have done for Indigenous peoples?
7. What are the sources of information for people to get this perception?

GENDER

8. Within the context of the Peace Accords, the situation of indigenous women has not been analyzed and especially from the position of Indigenous women. What is the relationship between this lack of analysis and savior language expressed in policies that are supposed to empower us? Why?
9. In your opinion, what are the reasons Guatemala has separated the discussion of women from that of indigenous populations?
10. What is your perception of the homogenization of women under the feminist movement and the homogenization of Indigenous people without addressing the gender question?
11. How would you conceptualize gender from your cultural location? For example, one is kabawi’il or the concept of the double gaze?
12. In your opinion, has Maya conceptualizations of balance between women and men been infiltrated and changed by Western impositions? How?
13. If so, what is your opinion on reclaiming, remembering and living our ancestral knowledge for the fulfillment of the Peace Accords and also to construct a society that is more balanced and non-discriminatory?

EDUCATION

14. In the context of the Peace Accords, the curriculum contents for Maya Education have begun development. The issue of gender has not been addressed, perhaps to the differences in concepts. In your opinion, is it possible to reclaim our ancestral knowledge to develop or include a concept that is eminently from the culture? How?
15. The next *Baktun* (52 year cycle) begins in 2012. Do you think our culture can contribute to balance what is out of balance on this planet? What and how?
16. What are your thoughts on intercultural bilingual education being relegated to only indigenous populations?
17. Can Indigenous education break the divide between those considered real citizens of the nation (i.e., non-indigenous)?
18. Is the current effort of Maya schools the basis for Indigenous Maya education?
19. Are there any specific aspects of Indigenous Maya knowledge that you apply daily in your work and community that help you stay whole?
20. Any other comments or questions?
Appendix B
List of Acronyms

AIDIPI – Acuerdo de Identidades y Desarrollo de Pueblos Indígenas / Agreement on Identities and Rights of Indigenous Peoples

ALMG – Academia de Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala / Guatemalan Academy for Maya Languages

COPMAGUA - Coordinación de Organizaciones del Pueblo Maya de Guatemala / Coalition of Maya Peoples’ Organizations in Guatemala

COMG - Consejo de Organizaciones Mayas Guatemaltecas / Council of Maya Organizations in Guatemala

CNEM – Consejo Nacional de Educación Maya / National Council for Maya Education

CNPRE - Comisión Nacional Permanente de Reforma Educativa / National Permanent Commission for Educational Reform

DEMI – Defensoría de la Mujer Indígena / Office of the Defender of Indigenous Women

DICADE – Dirección de Calidad y Desarrollo Educativo / Directorate for Educational Development and Quality

DIGEBI - Dirección General de Educación Bilingüe Intercultural / General Directorate for Bilingual Intercultural Education

IDRC – Centro de Investigaciones para el Desarrollo Internacional – International Development Research Centre

MINEDUC – Ministerio de Educación / Ministry of Education

MINUGUA – Misión de Verificación de las Naciones Unidas en Guatemala / United Nations Verification Mission
PA – Acuerdos de Paz / Peace Accords

PRODESSA – Programa de Desarrollo Santiago / Santiago Development Program

PROEINCA – Programa de Educación Intercultural de Centro América / Program for Intercultural Education in Central America

PROEMBI - Programa de Educación Multicultural Bilingüe / Program for Multicultural Bilingual Education (now defunct)

PRONEBI - Programa Nacional Educación Bilingüe Intercultural / National Program for Bilingual Intercultural Education

PRONADE – Programa Nacional de Autogestión para el Desarrollo Educativo / National Program for Self-Managed Educational Development (now defunct)

UNESCO – Organización de las Naciones Unidas para la Educación, las Ciencias y la Cultura / United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

URNG – Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca / Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unit

USAID – Agencia Estadounidense para el Desarrollo Internacional / United States Agency for International Development